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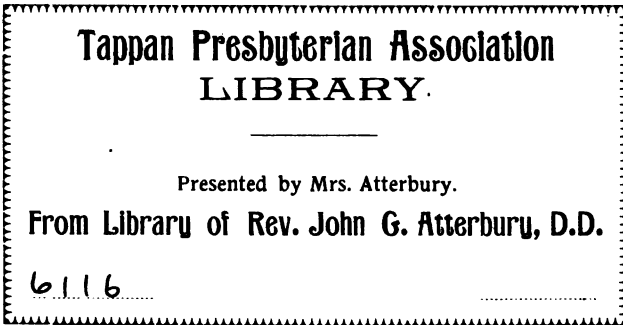
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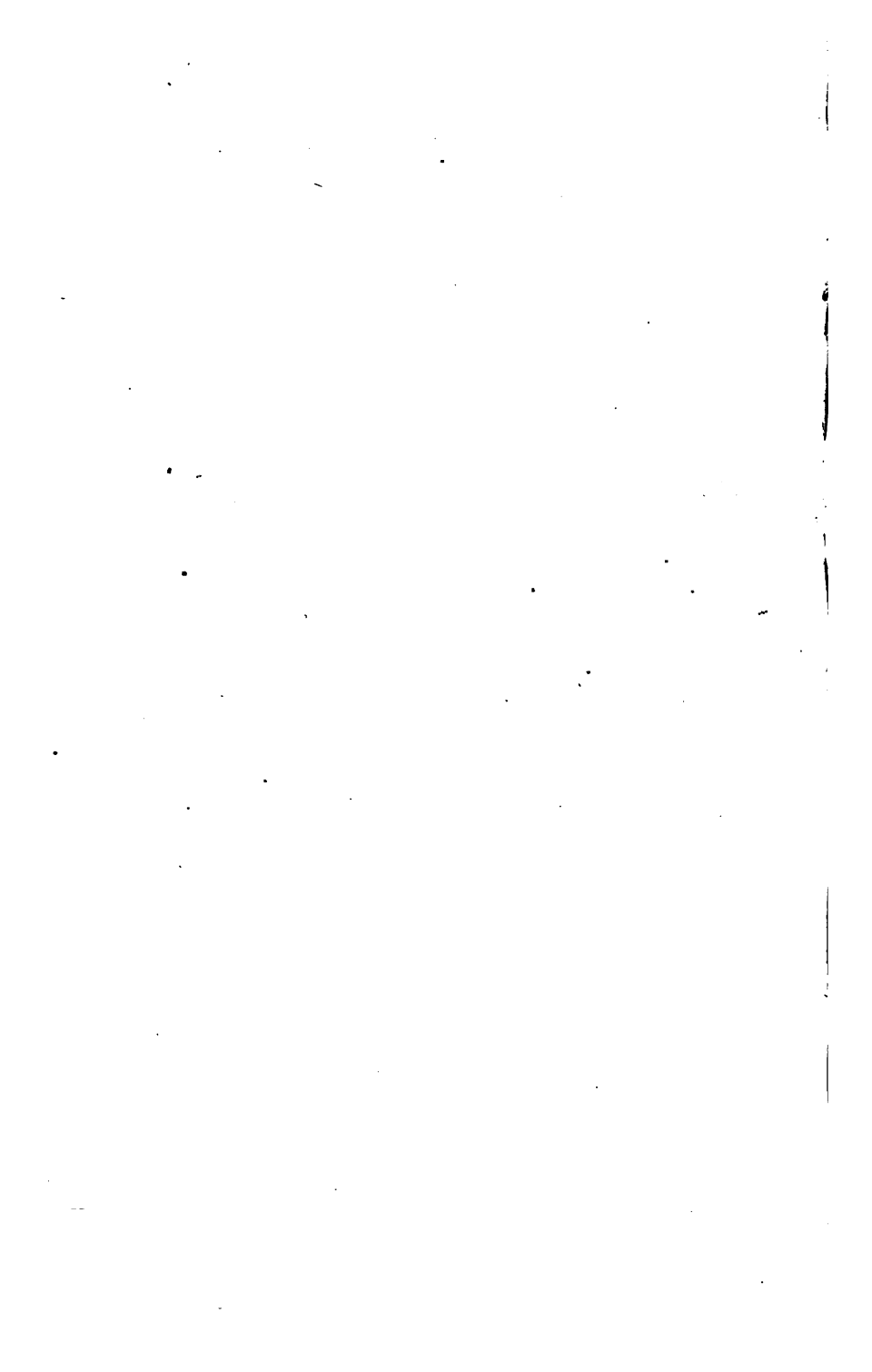
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THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD:

AN EXPOSITION

OF THE

TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

BY THE

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SECOND EDITION.

NEW YORK:

ROBERT CARTER, 58 CANAL STREET,
AND PITTSBURG, 56 MARKET STREET.

1846.

74

gift
Tappan Presb. Ass.
3-18-1932

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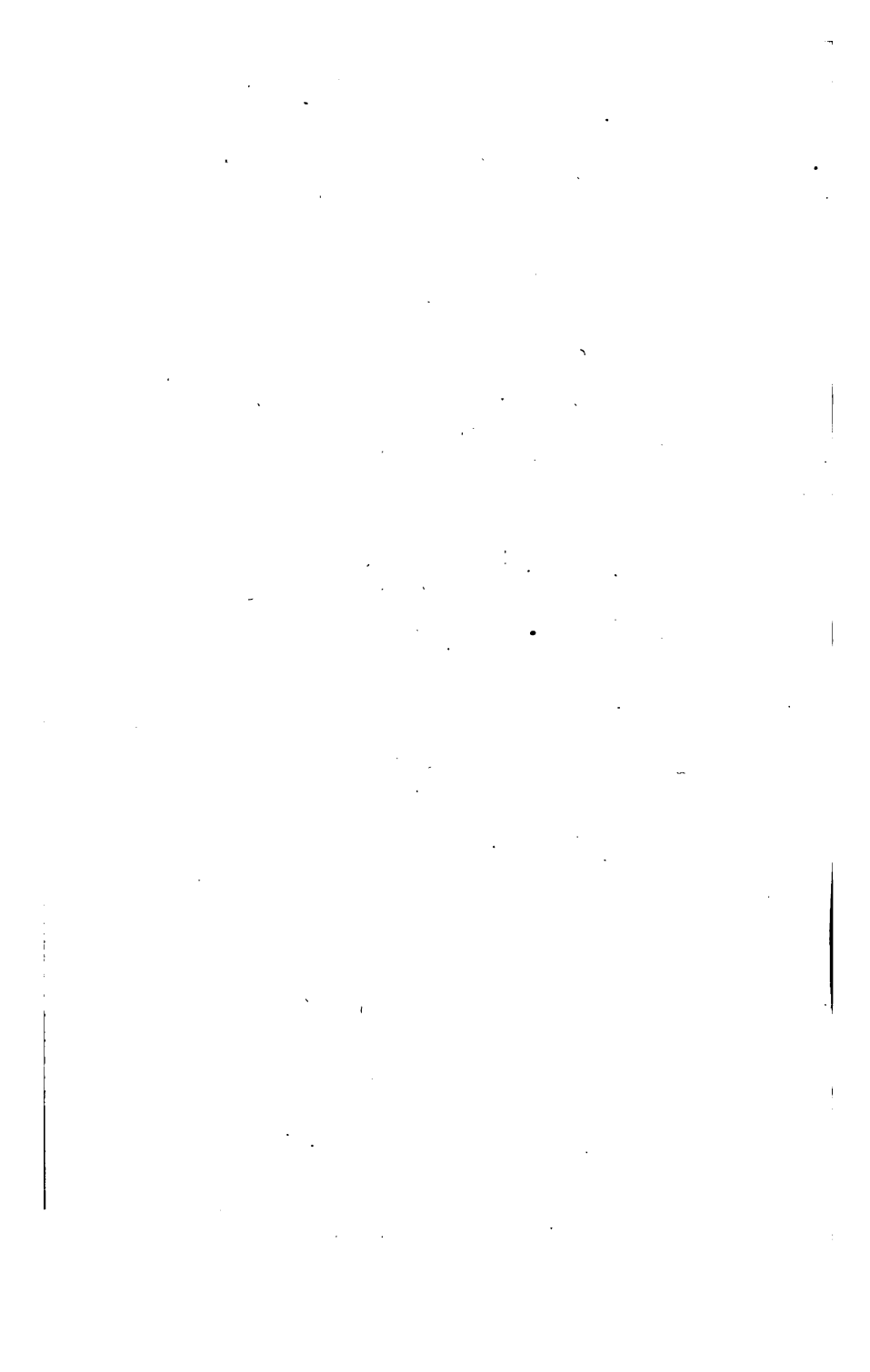
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THE

TITLE AND SCOPE OF THE PSALM.

¶ "*A Psalm of David.*"

THIS title informs us to whose pen, under Divine inspiration, we are indebted for this beautiful and instructive Psalm. We cannot, indeed, in every instance, depend on the authenticity of the titles prefixed to the Psalms. No doubt, however, has been entertained regarding the one before us; and the Twenty-third Psalm is universally allowed to be the production of the Son of Jesse. But in regard to the time, and the occasion, of its composition, no authentic information has come down to us. Various conjectures have been formed on these two points, but nothing definite can be now concluded concerning them. That we possess the Psalm itself is a matter of high congratulation. Neither the precise time, nor the particular occasion, on which it was composed, are necessary to be known in order to our spiritual enjoyment of its contents.

The Twenty-third Psalm commends itself to the heart of the believer by its own internal excellence. Natural in its structure, simple and perspicuous in its language, and elegant and attractive in its imagery, it breathes forth sentiments of confidence towards God,

of gratitude and of joy. There is a depth of meaning in every sentence—a rich variety of experience in every verse—and a fulness of joy from its commencement to its conclusion, which comprehends all that is needed in life and in death, in time and throughout eternity. The memoirs of departed Christians amply testify to this fact. How often has the Twenty-third Psalm been cited by the dying believer as a most appropriate expression of his past experience, his present feelings, and his future hopes ! To multitudes of the faithful, this Psalm has doubtless proved a rich source of consolation, in every age since it was composed by the sweet singer of Israel.

Though unable, it may be, to appropriate every high, and undoubting, declaration of confidence in God, which this Psalm contains; who does not feel that they are all exactly such as he desires to be able to adopt in the progress of life, and at the period of death ? To have Jehovah for a Shepherd—to feel no want—to enjoy rest and peace, restoration and guidance—and to fear no evil in the last hour of nature's extremity—to be the guest of God, to have a table provided—honour conferred—abundance supplied—goodness and mercy following us through life—and the house of the Lord as our dwelling-place for ever, are blessings so transcendent and desirable, that as we read this Psalm, we almost instinctively turn it into a prayer, "Lord, be thou my Shepherd. Suffer me never to want. Make me to lie down in green pastures. Lead me beside still waters. Restore my soul. Conduct me in paths of righteousness for thy name's sake. And when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, let me fear no evil ; for then, O then, be thou with me, thy rod and thy staff

●

let them comfort me. Prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Anoint my head with oil; and make my cup run over. Oh that goodness and mercy may surely follow me all the days of my life; and that I may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!"

Indeed, it is rather as a prayer, than as a song of thanksgiving, that this Psalm, which yet itself contains no prayer, is used by many Christians. They feel that it expresses rather what they wish to be, than what they really are. They cherish the hope that ere they die, they shall one day participate in the elevated experience of the Psalmist. Yet, perhaps, they make no vigorous, habitual, and determined, efforts to attain that strength of faith, that beauty of holiness, and that joyfulness of spirit, which are here exhibited. They do not feel so grieved and self-condemned as they ought, for living below their privileges! This is a serious, and we fear a common, error. Men too easily persuade themselves that however indispensable progressive improvement and prosperity may be in business and in science, they are not so necessary in religion. They forget that from the moment of our spiritual birth, there must be a continual growth. That as in the corn, there is first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear: so in the family of Christ, there are "babes," and "young men," and "fathers." A babe that never grows—a youth who advances not towards the maturity of manhood, is a monster in nature. It has been well remarked that there is no standing still in the school of Christ. Our constant prayer ought therefore to be, that as we become older with every advancing moment, we may also become richer and riper in every heavenly grace.

Are we not commanded to "go on unto perfection?" Heb. vi. 1. Does not the Apostle desire that "every one of us do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end?" Is it not solemnly enjoined upon all believers to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?" 2 Pet. iii. 18. Who would not wish, and earnestly wish, to become more pure from sin, more free from doubts, more holy in every thought, more like to the image of his Lord, and more conscious of union and communion with the God of his salvation?

There are however many sincere, but anxious and desponding, Christians, who hesitate to adopt the cheerful language of this Psalm. They are so depressed by the burden of their unworthiness that they are each ready to exclaim, "Such expressions of confidence and joy I can never use! I read them as the happy experience of a saint of God, but I dare not reckon myself amongst the number of those, who are privileged to appropriate such blessings to themselves!" Such persons we would affectionately seek to encourage by a few prefatory words, ere they enter on the perusal of this Psalm. We would earnestly desire to be instrumental in the hand of the all-gracious Spirit to gladden the "hearts of the righteous whom the Lord would not make sad," Ezek. xiii. 22. We would seek to enable them to rise from one degree of faith and hope, of love and joy, to another, till they can join with the Psalmist in their inmost hearts, and use his "spiritual song" as a delightful expression of their own individual experience. And in regard to that sense of their own unworthiness which hinders their confidence in God, we would entreat them to keep ever clearly in view the distinct and peculiar offices

of the law and the gospel. The Law shows us that we possess no righteousness in which to stand before the Most High. The Gospel informs us that the righteousness of another is provided for us ; and that this righteousness is the only and the all-sufficient ground on which to obtain acceptance with God now, and admission to heaven hereafter. Many who are not wholly ignorant of this distinction, live under the feeling that as the law has convinced them that they are sinners, and have no righteousness of their own to trust in, they ought not at once to obey the Gospel call, to trust in God himself. They do not clearly perceive that the Gospel commands them to possess confidence, because it has supplied them with a new and all-sufficient basis.

Were we required of God to rejoice in our own righteousness:—to be strong in our own strength ;—or to place confidence in our own wisdom, it would indeed be right and reasonable to reply that we possess neither strength nor righteousness, and therefore that we cannot possibly rejoice. In this case to doubt would be our duty : and to be full of fear and of unbelief could incur no guilt. To a command saying, “Trust in yourself,” our reply would be natural and correct, “I am so sinful and unworthy I cannot trust in myself.” The command of God however is, “Trust not in yourselves ; ye are sinners and unworthy, but trust in Me.” Throughout the whole compass of the Scriptures, we are not, in one single instance, required to rejoice in ourselves, but the exhortations to rejoice in the Lord are numerous and oft repeated, “Rejoice in the Lord always ; and again I say, Rejoice,” Phil. iv. 4.

The desponding christian sadly mistakes when he

allows that sense of unworthiness, which justly hinders him from trusting in himself, to deprive him also of confidence in his God. The very glory of the gospel is this, that it has made a special provision for the unworthiness of man. It brings from heaven to guilty men, a message of love and of reconciliation. It says to them, "Though you are sinful and unworthy, yet God desires and commands you to trust in him!" Did the message stop there, did it utter nothing but the bare command, "Trust in me," we should feel that we were utterly unable to comply, until it also exhibited something in the character of God on which we could fix our trust. Should a king, for instance, say to the rebel whom he had apprehended, "Trust in me," the mere word of command could not excite that sentiment in his breast. But if the king should accompany these words with special tokens of his love and favour, would not the rebel feel that he could no longer disobey? Would he not now regard it as his privilege and his delight to place the fullest confidence in such a gracious sovereign! The injunction, "Trust in me," instead of wearing the aspect of a stern and rigid demand, would appear in the light of an announcement of mercy—of a declaration of pardon and forgiveness—and of a gracious proposition from his sovereign, that henceforth, instead of enmity and rebellion, there should be a covenant of love and of allegiance subsisting between them!

Such is the nature of the gospel demand. This Sovereign is God. The apprehended rebel is man. This gracious Sovereign has not only said "Trust in me," but he has also given us abundant cause to do so. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should

not perish, but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. The death of the Son of God, under that curse which we had merited, proves beyond all doubt that we ought to repose the fullest confidence in the love and the goodness of our heavenly King. The strongest conviction which we may entertain of our own unworthiness, can never equal that knowledge of it which is possessed by God. When therefore in Christ Jesus, he calls upon us to exercise confidence towards him, why should we make our own more limited sense of that unworthiness the ground of our distrust? Does not the gospel declare that God has laid all our unworthiness on the head of his own Son, and that he has received from him instead thereof, a pure and perfect righteousness? The goodness of God, therefore, his clemency as a Sovereign towards a rebel, are beyond dispute: and while we are taught that our unworthiness has by no means been palliated or concealed, because it has been exacted of our Redeemer, we learn from the fact of this Surety being God's own Son, that the fullest love and the most unlimited confidence are due to the Most High.

The Holy Bible, which commands us to trust in God, has thus revealed at the same time his name and character. But for this revelation, we could not obey that command. Knowledge of the nature and the disposition of another, and of his good-will towards us, is absolutely necessary to our possessing confidence in him. Therefore the Scripture declares that in the knowledge of God standeth our "eternal life," John xvii. 3. And it also ascribes our deliverance from the corruption of our natural state, to the power of this knowledge: "they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. ii. 20. This implies not mere historical knowledge, but a scriptural, spiritual, sanctifying and saving apprehension of God as revealed in Christ, and of the Redeemer in his person, in his work, and in his offices. To know God in Christ is life to the soul. The Scripture says, "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee," Job xxii. 21. The great and glorious Being who is invisible to sinful mortals, has condescended to reveal himself to them as a God of mercy and of love. To make himself more clearly known by his creatures, he has graciously come down to their earthly apprehension. As a parent in communicating instruction to his child, must adapt himself to his youthful capacity, so the paternal kindness of God has adapted the instructions of eternal truth to our finite understanding. Sensible images are employed to represent to us spiritual qualities. The distant and unknown realities of heaven, are brought near to our apprehension by the illustrative power of familiar objects. We are charmed by the discovery of resemblance between the earthly type and the heavenly substance. Our attention is arrested by the figurative language employed, and thus the doctrine inculcated is more indelibly imprinted on our memory.

How beautiful, for instance, is the pastoral scene which the first portion of this Psalm depicts! The eye seems to rest upon a fertile vale which opens to our view. On one side of it the verdant mounds and swelling hills rise toward the distant mountains. On the other side there gently flows a pleasant stream, with its silvery waters glistening in the sun. In the midst, on the plain, is the Shepherd with his flock! Some of the sheep are browsing at his feet. Some

are reclining in the abundant pasture. Others are enjoying the refreshing waters! And ever and anon the watchful eye of the Shepherd surveys them all! Oh peaceful and happy scene! Fairest and most inviting of this world's pictures! Well may it be applied by the pen of inspiration to portray alike the kindness and the care of God towards man, and the safety and the happiness of man when in a state of dependence upon his God! It furnishes a most instructive emblem. As the shepherd is to his flock, so is God to his people: and such as the sheep are to their shepherd, so are the believers to their Lord!

Did the book of inspiration speak of the Most High, only according to the pure spirituality of his nature, it would be a volume of abstract terms and ideas, above the reach of our present limited faculties. But the heart of the invisible God was filled with affection towards his fallen human family. He knew that our natural eye could not see him, and that our outward ear could not hear him, as he is in himself; therefore he took our nature that men might see, he spake words that men might hear, how his heart yearned towards them. So real, so ardent is the love of God, that he employs every term of affection which human language contains, every title of relationship which human society furnishes, and every office of kindness which human friendship supplies, in order to express its fulness to our minds, and to impress its truth upon our hearts. Yea, all animate and inanimate things are held up before us as mirrors to reflect the image of love. From the eagle that stirreth up her nest, and beareth her young upon her wings, to the domestic fowl that gathers her brood beneath them, no figure is too simple, no illustration is too familiar, for the pen

of inspiration to employ. As is the husband to the wife, and the parent to the child; as is the head to the body, and the king to his people; as is the physician to his patient, and the advocate to his client, so is God in Christ to the soul of man.

The Scriptures teach us to regard God not only as an almighty Creator, and an unerring Judge, but also as a Preserver, and a Benefactor, as a Friend, and as a Father. Numerous are the names, and various are the emblems, employed to enlighten our minds, and to enlarge our conceptions, to engage our affections, and to increase our faith in the Lord Jesus. He is called the First and the Last,—the Author and the Finisher of the faith,—the Heir of all things, and the Father of the everlasting age. He is spoken of as a Way and as a Door,—as a Refuge and as a Fountain,—as a Lion and as a Lamb,—as the Bread of life,—and as the Head of his church.—He is likened to a Rock and a Stone of strength,—to a Tried Stone, a precious Corner Stone, and a Sure Foundation. He is exhibited as a Tree of Life,—as the Root and the Offset of David,—as a Righteous Branch, as the True Vine, and the Rose of Sharon. He is represented as a Star out of Jacob—as the Dayspring from on high—as the Bright and Morning Star—and as the Sun of Righteousness—the Light of the world. In the offices which he discharges for our salvation, he is described as a Servant, as a Messenger, and as a Faithful Witness:—as a Shepherd, a Physician, a Friend, a Brother, a Bridegroom, a Husband:—as an Apostle, a Priest, a Bishop, a Mediator, an Advocate, a Counsellor, a Surety, a Redeemer, and a Saviour:—as a Captain, a Commander, a Lawgiver, a Governor, a

Lord, a Prince, a Potentate, a King, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords !

What a delightful concentration of names and attributes, of qualities, properties, and relationships ! What a transcendent combination of excellence ! The contemplation of it is surely well fitted, as no doubt it is wisely designed, to exhibit to us the all-sufficiency of the Saviour ; and to call forth our gratitude and praises for his amazing and perfect suitableness to our condition, as weak and unworthy, as lost and needy, as sinful and defenceless. For were it not previously true, that Jehovah had placed himself in a near and gracious relationship to fallen man, these names and titles, these types and figures would be delusive and destructive to our souls. But now in Christ Jesus the invisible God is truly and fully revealed as entertaining "good will towards men."

Yet numerous, varied, and significant, as are these names and titles, these figures and emblems, they cannot sufficiently express the fulness, and represent the excellency, of our God and Saviour. Increase their number as you may. Multiply them without end. Let imagination employ her loftiest conceptions, and clothe them in her fairest colouring, the reality far exceeds them all. The fulness of Jesus is unsearchable ! The love of our Emmanuel is unutterable ! The length, the height, the depth, and the breadth thereof, passeth knowledge. The inspired writers find no words adequate to express it. "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God ! how great is the sum of them ! If I should count them they are more in number than the sand !" *Psa. cxxxix. 17.*

The blessed revelation which the gospel has made of the unsearchable Jehovah, is well fitted to impart to

every one who believes it, a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Such, indeed, is its effect, in proportion to our faith in its veracity. And the more we set ourselves to contemplate the glorious and gracious Being thus made known to us, the stronger will our trust in him become, and consequently the more full and permanent our joy. "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips. When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches," *Psa. lxiii. 5, 6.* "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased," *Psa. iv. 7.*

Such appears to have been the holy joy with which David entered on the composition of this Twenty-third Psalm. The benevolence of the character of God, and the excellence of his kindnesses, absorbed his thoughts. He gloried in the freeness and the fulness of Divine grace. He rejoiced so exceedingly at the fact of the Most High condescending to place himself in friendly relationship towards him, that his inward emotions could only find utterance in the language of imagery. He breaks forth abruptly with this beautiful simile. "The Lord is my shepherd!" In four verses he emphatically declares what this Shepherd did for his safety and his happiness; then suddenly introduces another image, that he may without proximity expatiate upon the same blessed theme. He represents his Lord not only as a tender Shepherd, who feeds his flock in the richest pastures, but also as a princely Host, who entertains his guests with the most generous hospitality, and spreads his banquet after a royal manner!

These beautiful and appropriate metaphors, by

which David designs to describe his spiritual experiences, were suggested to his mind, we humbly conceive, by his own temporal circumstances. He had been a shepherd, and his early life had been spent on the plains of Bethlehem amidst his father's flocks. He had been suddenly exalted to honour. A name and a place had been given him at the court of his sovereign. He was openly acknowledged to be the conqueror of the Philistines—the champion of Israel—and the deliverer of his country. As such he became an associate of nobles—an affianced member of the royal family—and an honoured guest at the king's table! What a remarkable transition! The once unnoticed youth of a rural village became a distinguished ornament of a royal court! The humble shepherd was transformed into a renowned and valiant warrior! And he who had tended a few sheep in the wilderness, was himself attended as a Prince, and seated at a banquet which had been royally prepared before him!

To a devout mind like that of David, such circumstances as these could not fail to suggest suitable reflections. And we have often wondered why, amongst other special occasions, this most remarkable period of his life was not celebrated by an appropriate Psalm. May not the one before us be considered in this light? We humbly conceive it may. The idea forces itself upon the mind, the more we investigate the Psalm. The joyous and sanguine sentiments it contains, together with the nature of the images employed, and especially this remarkable transition from the figure of a fold to that of a banquet, have led us to conclude that this Psalm was written at this transition period of his life; and with this reference we have

ventured to expound its different verses. The principal part of his life had been connected with the sheepfold; and the greater portion of this Psalm is occupied with the beautiful and descriptive image which it naturally suggested to his mind. He had now just entered on the enjoyment of princely entertainments, and honour, and prosperity; and to these also he alludes, under the figure of his honourable reception at a banquet. And as his youthful and ardent mind would now be filled with joyful expectations for the future; so we find that the last sentiments which he records are of the most sanguine and glowing description: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Thus by two most striking figures, the Psalmist exhibits the blessedness he enjoyed in believing what God had become towards him, and had accomplished on his behalf. Truly it is an act of great condescension on the part of the Most High to allow himself and his ways of dealing with sinful men to be described under these earthly terms and emblems. He must first vouchsafe to place himself in these relationships of a Shepherd and a Host towards us, ere we can, without presumption, address him by these titles. And it is just because he has already so united himself to our souls, that he invites and expects, nay, also, that he exhorts and commands us to love, and to confide in him as our Shepherd and our Host!

The strong expressions then of confidence in God which the first part of this Psalm contains, are based on the revelation which God had been pleased to make of himself in the character and capacity of a Shepherd! The reader's attention should be firmly

fixed on this fact. It was God who made himself David's Shepherd, and not David who procured this honour for himself. And though he proceeds to give utterance to some of the strongest expressions, the most unwavering declarations, and the highest and most exalted sentiments, of confidence in God which the Bible contains; yet a strict examination proves them to be simple, natural, and necessary, deductions from the primary statement, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Almost the entire Psalm may be said to be comprehended in this first sentence. If the Lord be our Shepherd, it follows that we shall not want, that we shall be preserved from danger, restored from wanderings, conducted in right paths, and comforted against all fear of evil in the valley of the shadow of death! It is like the child of a wealthy and powerful monarch exclaiming, "The sovereign is my father!" and who then adds, "I shall be suitably provided for—servants shall attend me—counsellors shall direct—and armies shall defend!" These are deductions from his first statement. They are but enlargements of that which is contained in the two names, Father and King. In like manner these two titles Lord and Shepherd, include in them all that the Psalmist here expresses. To say that we possess an Almighty Shepherd, is to affirm that we shall have all things that we require. For what Shepherd is he who suffers his flock to hunger? Is he worthy of the name, who leaves his sheep exposed to the ravages of the wolf?

How many are there who desire to say with the Psalmist, "I shall not want! I shall fear no evil!" This, however, they can never attain, till they have previously learned to say with him, "The Lord is my

Shepherd." To obtain a satisfactory persuasion of their own present and future safety is too exclusively desired by many Christians. They are too much occupied with thinking of themselves, and too little of their Lord. They live upon their own spiritual condition—upon their frames and feelings. They are greatly elevated when any sensible enlargement is vouchsafed, and rejoice more in the gift than in its gracious Giver. And again they are cast down and miserable as if all hope were lost, when they can find nothing in their own hearts to yield them consolation. We would earnestly desire to turn all such persons from this pursuit of a false, to the possession of a true peace, by fixing their faith not so much on what they are to God, as on what he is to them. The only true source of consolation and confidence for life and death, for time and for eternity, lies in Jehovah, the unchanging and unchangeable Fountain—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The timid and trembling Christian can never be delivered from his doubts and apprehensions till he be brought to live on God alone, and find in him the secret of his unfailing peace, and the basis of his everlasting happiness. It is not what we can make ourselves to God that will change him; but it is what he has made himself to man that will change us. Were it even possible that we could make ourselves sheep of his fold, what assurance could we have that he would undertake the office of a Shepherd? We might earnestly wish and fervently pray that he would do so, but neither our wishes nor our prayers could give us evidence of the fact!

How blessed and delightful, then, is it to know assuredly by the volume of truth, that ere we had

conceived a wish, or breathed a prayer, the Lord Jehovah of his own accord, in the most free and gracious manner, placed himself in the relation of a Friend and a Shepherd to our helpless souls! No reason can be given why he condescends to love us, and to take pleasure in watching over us. All we can say is this, that he is pleased to do so, because it pleases him! and that he is rich in mercy towards us, "for the great love wherewith he loves us!" Eph. ii. 4. Oh how worthy, then, is God of all our love and confidence! He loved us for his own love's sake, for there remained not a single atom of attractiveness in our nature to draw forth his regard. Oh what a humiliating doctrine is this! It fills us with despair as to ourselves, yet it fills us with joy as to our God; for it proves his love to be great and marvellous, indeed, when it could fix on those who were not worth loving!

When we understand that love has begun with God, and flows from him to man, we feel that we can fully depend both on the purity of the spring, and on the continuance of its flow. Unhappy indeed, and hopeless would be our condition, if the love of the Lord to us were only created by our love to him! Has the Scripture affirmed, "God loves those who first love him?" Oh no! The testimony of the aged Apostle, who had leaned on the bosom of his Lord, is quite the contrary. "We love him because he first loved us," 1 John iv. 19. It is then in the free and spontaneous love of God that the believer is to rejoice. It is on the relationship which God has graciously assumed towards him, that the Christian is to place all his dependence!

Appropriate to yourself, Oh desponding Christian,

this revelation of the Most High. Give credit to these names. Believe that God is willing to act towards you according to them. He does not regard them as empty titles. Neither must we. See how David elsewhere employs the revealed names and character of God to comfort his spirit in despondency, and to fortify his soul under the assaults of foes. "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower," Psa. xviii. 1, 2. This is natural. The sailor trusts in his captain: the soldier in his commander: the traveller in his guide. According to the character for skill, prudence, and faithfulness which they severally possess, so is the confidence they repose in them, and so also is their peace in following, and their expectation of success and triumph. The name of a general, that is, his character as a commander, dispirits or inspires his army. Who ever heard of troops flushed with the hope of victory, following a leader who had been often vanquished? Nor is it only necessary that a commander be possessed of bravery and skill, he must be known to be so by all his soldiers. The moral effect on their minds is not produced by the mere existence of the highest qualifications in their general, but by their believing that he possesses them.

Let, then, your eye be intently fixed, O timid and distrustful Christian, on the character and relationships of your God. Contemplate him, for instance, as voluntarily revealing himself under the title of a Shepherd. How simple, expressive, and inviting, is the appellation here assumed by the Most High! A shepherd presents to us such a true picture of tenderness

and care ; of wisdom ; of strength ; and of resources, that our hearts are encouraged to trust implicitly in that God whom this name describes, and to draw freely from him a supply in all our necessities. We learn with joy that the Lord Jehovah desires to discharge towards us the office of a Shepherd, and that he requires us to submit ourselves to him as the sheep of his fold. If he watch over us with fidelity, it is that we may repose in him with confidence. If he stretch forth the hand of his power to defend us, it is to invite us to rely on his protection. When he leads, we are to follow. When he calls, we are to obey ; and when his word is pledged for our sustenance, we are not to dishonour him by entertaining fears that we shall be left to want. Thus the knowledge of God in his revealed character as a Shepherd, produces its legitimate effect upon our hearts. We feel that it is not with mere names and titles that we have to do, but with a living Being, whose nearness and agency, whose love and power, this name and title enables us to realize. God is no longer regarded as an abstract idea, as a theoretical perfection, or as a remote and undefined essence, with or without whom we can be equally safe and happy. We become conscious that we have formed an actual acquaintance with the unseen God, and that a happy relationship has been established between us !

Ask yourself such questions as these—Did the Lord so many years ago, of his own accord, take this office upon himself? Does he call himself the Shepherd, yea, the good Shepherd? Does he undertake to be the guide and the provider of the flock? Has he commanded us to follow him, that he may bring us into a safe and happy fold? Has he laid down his

life, rather than suffer any of his sheep to perish? Let such questions as these be often in your mind. Meditate continually on what Christ is, on what he has already done, and on what he promises still to do. Acquaint yourself with the power and the willingness of Christ to act as your Shepherd. Settle it well in your mind that his resources are boundless, and that he is ever ready to render them available for his flock. Endeavour thus to obtain an enlarged and accurate acquaintance with the Lord your Shepherd, and you will find your peace and happiness of mind, your strength and confidence of faith, proportionably increased. You will behold in Christ a blessed counterpart to yourself. Vile, weak, empty, and defenceless, as you feel yourself to be, you will obtain in him wisdom, strength, righteousness, fulness of supply, and Almighty protection. Depressed and melancholy as you may well be on account of what you yourself are, you will learn that your only cause of rejoicing is in what the Lord is to you, and in what the Lord has promised to do for you. And contemplating thus the character of the Lord, and beholding, in Christ, as in a glass, the glory of his name and nature, you shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Lord the Spirit," 2 Cor. iii. 18. Christ is the sun of life and light and joy to the human heart. "Look unto me and be ye saved." This looking has a moral and transforming influence. It is like the continual looking of intimate friends upon each other, which causes them to assimilate in thought and feeling. It is like the looking of a confiding and obedient child upon a wise and honoured parent, whose manner and example he insensibly imitates, and into the form of whose soul he is gradually moulded!

By thus keeping the eye fixed on the character of Christ, and on the offices which he discharges for our salvation, the obligations which we owe to him in return are more effectually impressed upon our minds. We become filled with higher thoughts of his excellences, and deeper thoughts of our own demerits. And the more convinced we become of the care and kindness and good faith which he exercises towards us, the more imperatively bound do we feel to act with gratitude, obedience, and fidelity towards him. The knowledge of his unmerited love, his amazing condescension and self-sacrifice for us, inspires us with the highest confidence towards him, and brings us under the strongest obligation to renounce everything that is displeasing in his sight. "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again," 2 Cor. v. 14.

Significant and beautiful as this emblem of a Shepherd is, David seems to have felt that it could not adequately express the greatness and the excellency of the Lord's condescension towards him. His mind was occupied with enlarged conceptions of the goodness of Jehovah. He desired, if it were possible, to do justice to the lofty theme, and to secure a full utterance for his own fervent gratitude. He therefore selects another figure, as opposite in all its features to that of a Shepherd and his flock, as could well be imagined; just as if his design were to show that from the most elevated as well as the most humble circumstances of life, appropriate illustrations may be derived of the goodness and the power, the liberality and the conde-

scension of the Most High God. By a royal banquet—where a table is expressly prepared for his enjoyment—by his gracious reception there, in defiance of the envy and the hatred of his enemies—by the marks of love and of respect conferred upon him by the sovereign—and by the overflowing abundance of which he is made a partaker, he represents to us the condescension and the liberality of God, and declares the honourable and joyous condition to which he was himself exalted as a believer.

Most happy then and blessed is the man who believes in God as he is revealed in Christ. He is not only a humble sheep of a fold, he is also an honoured guest at a banquet! And the great and gracious Jehovah in whom he confides, is not only a Shepherd who preserves his sheep from all evil, but also a Royal Host who richly provides for his friends in the very presence of their enemies! Oh how it fills our hearts with joy to discover that the Shepherd whom we follow is a great King! We learn that he is leading us not only into the valley of peace, but also into the kingdom of grace! And we obtain the delightful assurance that he can not only preserve us for ever within the sacred enclosure of his fold, but that he can also exalt us to everlasting honour and gladness in his kingdom of glory!

The Lord Jesus then is revealed to us in this Psalm as a SHEPHERD and a KING, abounding in wisdom, benevolence, and power! As our Shepherd and King he is to form the object of our confidence and obedience during the whole period of our earthly existence! As our Shepherd and King he shall be also the object of our hope and our veneration in the day of his glorious appearing: For before him shall be gathered all

nations ; and first as a Shepherd he will separate them one from another, dividing the sheep from the goats ; and then as a King he will say to those on his right hand, " Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world !" Matt. xxv. 34. Lastly, as our Shepherd and King he shall be the object of our love, our gratitude, and our adoration, throughout the endless ages of eternity ! For then as a Shepherd and a King he will rule in the midst of his flock, and no enemy shall approach them ! Under his heavenly and everlasting reign, his once invited and for ever welcomed guests shall " hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is " as their KING "in the midst of the throne, shall feed them" as their SHEPHERD, " and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and " as their GOD, He "shall wipe away all tears from their eyes !" Rev. vii. 16, 17.

THE FOLD.

THE SHEPHERD.

VERSE 1.—*The Lord is my Shepherd.*

WHAT security! what blessedness! are denoted by these words! The Psalmist truly is enjoying the “happiness of the man who has the God of Jacob for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God.” The Spirit of light and truth, of grace and of adoption, has given him inspiration. His soul, overflowing with lively and delightful emotions, pours forth this beautiful psalm! Brief, but emphatic, and comprehensive, is its opening announcement! In the holy confidence of faith, David gives utterance to his joyful recognition of a near relationship subsisting between the great Creator and himself,—“The Lord is my Shepherd!”

This beautiful and instructive similitude informs us at once what the Lord is to the believer, and what the believer is to the Lord. The nature, the excellency, and the completeness, of their relationship are strikingly exhibited. Such as a shepherd is to his flock, such the King of heaven condescends to become towards us his wandering, helpless, sinful creatures. By this simple image David presents before us in a

most graphic manner, the goodness, the tenderness, the watchful care, the providing love, the gracious nearness, and the protecting power, which God had manifested towards him. And again, in this single sentence, he gives us to understand that it is alike his duty, his desire, and his determination, to listen only to this Shepherd's voice, to follow implicitly in his footsteps, to feed exclusively within his pastures, to rely steadfastly on his faithfulness, and to confide continually in his protection! How near, how perfect, and how blessed, is the relationship thus subsisting between the believer and his God! How many, how varied, and how important, are the mutual duties of the pastor and his flock! How comforting, therefore, and how comprehensive, is this remarkable declaration of the Psalmist, "The Lord is my Shepherd!"

To appreciate fully the happiness which David enjoyed as a member of a flock, we must attentively consider the greatness of that Being whom he here denominates its Shepherd. "The LORD is my Shepherd;" that is, in the Hebrew original, the "Jehovah," the highest title by which God has revealed himself to man. It is the incommunicable name. "Thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth," *Psa. lxxxiii. 18.* Jehovah signifies existence—self-existence; existence without beginning and without end. It discloses to us nothing of the Divine Essence, but informs us of the Eternal Being. Jehovah is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," *Isa. lvii. 15.* He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending; which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty, *Rev. i. 8.* Jehovah is He who hath life in himself, *John v. 26,* and who giveth to all life and breath and all things,

Acts xvii. 25. Jehovah created the universe out of nothing: he upholds it with his hand—governs it by his word—and “callesh the things that be not, as though they were,” Rom. iv. 17. He is denominated the eternal King, 1 Tim. i. 17; the everlasting God, Rom. xvi. 26; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, Heb. xiii. 8. This “Jehovah,” says the Psalmist, “is my Shepherd!” This great and glorious Creator of the universe has graciously condescended to place himself in near relationship to me, his feeble, guilty, and erring creature! This self-existent and eternal Lord has taught me by his Spirit to know, and to admire, his condescension: and from my inmost soul I love, I prize, and ever will acknowledge his relationship to me, though most unworthy,—“The Lord is my Shepherd!”

Great and glorious, then, is the Being of whom David here speaks. And when he calls him a Shepherd, we are not to regard the title as one which the Psalmist of his own accord, and without warrant, had applied to God; but as an appellation which the Most High had graciously appropriated to himself.

From the earliest ages the God of mercy had been pleased to reveal himself to his people under the similitude of a Shepherd. The ancient church looked forward to the coming of the Messiah as the Shepherd and Preserver of Israel. The dying patriarch Jacob spake of him to his assembled children in this remarkable manner; “From thence is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel,” Gen. xlix. 21. Again, we learn by this psalm, and also by the eightieth, that this title was well known to the church as being acceptable to the Most High, for Asaph thus begins his supplication, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest

Joseph like a flock," Psa. lxxx. 1. To the advent of this Shepherd, who had led the children of Israel in all their wanderings, the prophets of old looked forward with eager expectation. "Behold," says Isaiah, "the Lord God will come . . . he shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young," Isa. xl. 10. Ezekiel declares in the name of the Lord, "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David (the Beloved); he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd," Ezek. xxxiv. 23. While thus the prophets hailed his advent, they were not ignorant of his gracious purpose to lay down his life for his flock, for thus was Zechariah inspired to write, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered," Zech. xiii. 7. When the fulness of the time was come, the Messiah appeared on the earth, and graciously assumed the title of Shepherd, that he might fulfil the prophecies he had inspired, and meet the expectations he had raised. This name therefore is not to be regarded as merely a beautiful figure with which the Lord Jesus adorned his discourse at Jerusalem. Neither did he employ it simply because the office and the character of a shepherd were appropriate emblems of the care and the love which he bestows upon his church: but also because the title and the duties, the character and the office, of the Messiah-Shepherd were his peculiar prerogatives. He alone possessed the right to that title, and therefore he declared, and a second time repeated the declaration, "I am the good Shepherd," John x. 11, 14.

The title thus claimed and appropriated by the Saviour, was exclusively applied to him—by the inspired apostles. St. Paul testifies of the Lord Jesus as a GREAT SHEPHERD. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep," Heb. xiii. 20. St. Peter likewise describes him as the CHIEF SHEPHERD, from whom all true pastors derive their authority, and shall obtain their reward: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye also shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away," 1 Pet. v. 4. Again the same apostle, who delighted to contemplate his Lord in this character, emphatically spake of him as THE SHEPHERD—the true, the only, Shepherd of the soul: "Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls," 1 Pet. ii. 25.

Jesus of Nazareth, then, is the Messiah-Shepherd—the Jehovah-Shepherd. To him patriarchs, psalmists, and prophets, under the Old Testament, looked forward. To him apostles, martyrs, and confessors, under the New Testament, bare witness as the Lord their Shepherd. Thus by all believers, in both dispensations, the same figurative language has been employed in prayer and praise. The Messiah has been known and loved as a Shepherd in all ages. The Gentile and the Jew rejoice together under the care of the same great Pastor. The Christian learns to identify himself with the Israelite. He holds the same faith with David. He feels himself to be a member of the same fold. He participates in all the blessings of the same flock. He places his trust in the same almighty Protector; and therefore joyfully adopts the same language, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

The Lord Jesus, from the beginning of the world,

is the only Shepherd of the universal church. He is the self-existing, uncreated, and eternal, Jehovah, whose love and care, whose providence and power, are alike unlimited and inexhaustible. His Shepherd-care extends over all time—embraces every dispensation—supplies every want—anticipates every emergency—comprehends every believer from the beginning to the end of the world—and shall everlastingly secure the safety and the happiness of every member of his flock! He is the Jehovah, “God over all, and blessed for ever,” Rom. ix. 5. Who then can hesitate to believe that he is an ALL-SUFFICIENT Shepherd? In strength He is almighty—in wisdom omniscient—in love unequalled—and in resources unbounded! What are those evils which he cannot foresee? What is that danger which he cannot avert? Where is that enemy whom he cannot subdue? What is the name, or the nature of that want which he is unable to supply? The various members of his flock are as different in their age, their desires, their dispositions, their temptations, and their necessities, as they are in their language, their country, and their complexion; but yet the eye of the Jehovah-Shepherd can observe each of his widely scattered sheep, as minutely as if they were all gathered before him into one spot;—his ear is as open to their several requests, as though he had the voice only of a single petitioner to regard;—and his hand can administer, out of the fulness of his resources, to each and to all of them, at any and at every moment, whatsoever blessings may prove most suitable to their case. To the troubled heart he can impart peace—to the weary, rest—and to the penitent, pardon. To the hungry soul he can give food—to the blind, sight—and to the sick, health. To the weak he can

send strength—to the wavering, resolution—and to the tempted, deliverance. He has counsel for the inexperienced—wisdom for the simple—and righteousness for the guilty. The proud he can clothe with humility, and the censorious with charity. To the selfish he can impart generosity—to the hasty, patience—and to the unstable, perseverance. On the young he can bestow docility—on the middle-aged, sobriety—and on the old, contentment. To the bereaved he administers resignation, and consolation to them that are in sorrow—to the living, an undying hope—and to the dying, an endless life!

Oh how the heart rises at the thought of a DIVINE SHEPHERD! Jehovah! the self-existent, the eternal, Lord, is the Shepherd of Israel! The Man that is the Fellow of the Lord of hosts is the Shepherd who was smitten for our sakes! The glorious Being who has now sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, Heb. i. 3, is the watchful pastor of the meanest of his flock! O most gracious and almighty Shepherd! never may my soul be destitute of thy protection! Oh, thrice happy flock, that abide within the fold! never may I wander from the “company of God’s faithful people!”

The consideration of so “good,” so “great,” a Shepherd, should captivate the best affections, and awaken the deepest gratitude of our hearts! Happy, for ever happy, is the man in whose breast the Spirit of the living God has inspired an appropriating faith, and kindled a holy and a fervent love! Who shall describe the blessedness of the individual who has experimentally learned to say with the Psalmist, “The Lord is my Shepherd?” Such a delightful declaration on his lip, implies a blessed persuasion in his heart, that the

skill and the resources, the care and the love, the experience and the power, of this Shepherd, shall all be exercised in providing for his wants, his safety, and his happiness! The very name of shepherd is a blessed pledge of union and affection between the pastor and his flock. It is a mutual assurance of fidelity. By assuming this office, the Lord Jesus has pledged himself to discharge all its incumbent duties: and by applying this title to him, do we not pledge ourselves to obey him constantly, to love him supremely, to trust him implicitly, and to follow him exclusively, as our only, our unerring, and our omnipotent, Shepherd?

Set before your mind, O believer, the various duties which a shepherd performs towards his flock. Consider the innumerable benefits which it derives from his care, and constant superintendence. A wise and faithful shepherd will neglect nothing that concerns his charge. His watchful presence will be with them at all seasons. With sound judgment and discretion he will exercise his authority over them. Every sheep committed to his care he will personally know, and consider himself to be responsible for its safety. To the most wholesome pastures it is his office to conduct them, and against every threatening danger he makes it his duty to protect them. Who should search after the wanderers from the fold—cleanse those that are defiled—and administer to the healing of the diseased, but the shepherd to whom their oversight belongs? In the thicket and the brier he will not leave any of his sheep to lie entangled, nor suffer them to be swept away by the overflowing waters. He will tenderly lead the halt and the blind, and patiently bear with the feeble and the froward. Over young and old, over weak and strong, he will unweariedly watch, and deal

with each of them in an appropriate manner. And lastly, he will carefully provide for the pasturage and the preservation of his whole flock in a safe and ample fold.

To fulfil all these onerous and important duties, how many, and how diversified, must be the qualifications of the shepherd ! To provide for the continual necessities of a large flock, he must possess resources of the most abundant kind. To give the requisite attention to the several wants of each individual member, he must be of a most patient, tender, and sympathizing spirit. When difficulties suddenly encompass, how quick must he be to devise, how skilful to direct, and how powerful and persevering to accomplish, the deliverance of his flock ! And when dangers overtake, how vigilant and courageous must the shepherd be, to defend his helpless sheep, and to drive away every enemy and assailant !

With the full knowledge of all these incumbent duties, and of all the qualifications necessary to their discharge, the blessed Redeemer graciously assumed the office of a shepherd. In what a supereminent degree he possesses these qualifications, and in what a perfect manner he fulfils these duties, no mere human language can sufficiently declare. The volume of inspiration has described him as the "great," and the "good," and the "chief," Shepherd—as the only Pastor of the one and only fold—and as "the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls." The flock is the constant subject of his thoughts, and the dearest object of his affections. Every want of his sheep is anticipated and provided for. In all the dangers that may threaten them, he is ever near to rescue and deliver. "All power is given unto him in heaven and on earth ;" no

enemy, therefore, will he suffer to destroy the feeblest member of his flock. For how many ages, and in how great difficulties, has he shown his wisdom to govern, and his ability to guide ! Oh who will doubt the sufficiency of his resources to meet every possible necessity, for to him "all things belong !" And in regard to his faithfulness to all his obligations, how delightful is the assurance which his own words contain, "Of those whom thou hast given me have I lost none !" John xviii. 9.

With the highest and most exalted sense of the excellency of this Shepherd, should every believer be animated. How glorious is the Being whom sinful man here calls his Shepherd ! How great is his condescension in undertaking this office ! How complete are his qualifications ! How abundant his resources ! How faithful his performance of its duties ! And how perfect and infallible shall be his success ! Elevating and ennobling is the thought, that the faithful of all periods and countries constitute one fold under this Divine Shepherd. The Lord Jesus is the everywhere-present Pastor, the universal Bishop and Overseer of souls. He has been present with his flock in all ages. He is with them now in all places. Scattered as they are in every part of the earth, he fails not to be near to every one of them. In the east and the west, in the north and the south, the souls of believers equally enjoy the experience of his care. This gracious Shepherd has declared that he will never leave his flock. His parting promise was full of consolation, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world," Matt. xxi. 20 ; and again he had said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," Matt. xviii. 20.

Well does it become every Christian to inquire, Is this Shepherd of the flock my Shepherd? Vitally important is this question, and closely does it concern every one of us. Has the Spirit of the living God taught thee to feel, O Reader, that, whatever be the plenty or the penury of thy outward condition, thy soul by nature is like a lonely sheep, straying in the deserts, bleating after safety, and encompassed by dangers? Hast thou heard that there is a Shepherd, a good Shepherd, and that all his sheep are protected and provided for? To know this much only, is not enough to meet thy case. Has a desire been awakened within thee, "Oh! that this Shepherd were mine?" And has this desire prompted the prayer, "Lord, take me into thy fold?" If this desire and this prayer be real, earnest, and influential, within thy heart, they testify that this spiritual Shepherd is seeking thy lost soul. Oh strive and struggle not against the friendly hand that would lay thee on his shoulder! The good Shepherd will bring thee home to his fold rejoicing. He will say, "This is my sheep, which was lost;" and thou shalt be enabled to reply, "The Lord is my Shepherd!" Such was the experience of David. The Spirit of God had taught him to feel that he was a sinner; that his natural condition was desolate and hopeless; that as a wanderer from God, his soul was lost; and that it was utterly impossible for him to effect his own salvation. Stirred up by these thoughts, the desires of his heart were turned heavenward. He was led earnestly to pray for deliverance from sin, for acceptance with God, and for the salvation of his precious soul. He knew that there was a Keeper of Israel who never slumbered nor slept. He believed that whosoever

trusted in him would never be disappointed. Under the drawings of the same Spirit, his desires became more intense, his prayers more fervent, and his faith more bold. He deliberately committed the keeping of his soul to the Shepherd of Israel; and with him he felt that it was safe. He believed that he who called himself a Shepherd, would not fail to act a shepherd's part; and joy and gratitude in consequence sprang up within his breast. Numerous and constant, therefore, as were his wants; powerful and inveterate as were his enemies; however feeble his own strength, and however great his own unworthiness, faith raised him superior to every depressing apprehension, and enabled him humbly, yet boldly, to exclaim, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

Seek, O Christian, earnestly seek to possess the same appropriating faith. The whole emphasis of this declaration lies in the possessive pronoun "*my*." Strike out this little word, and you destroy the sense and sweetness of the whole psalm. Had David merely said, "The Lord is a Shepherd," this truth would have proved too vague to elicit gratitude, to dispel fear, or to elevate his soul with joyful emotions. But no sooner was he enabled to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," than his heart glowed with gratitude and exultation. See how triumphantly he adds, "I shall not want,"—"I shall fear no evil." An appropriating faith expands the heart. Behold what life and energy it imparts! "Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee," *Psa. cxviii. 28.* "I will love thee, O Lord my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust: my buckler, and the horn of my sal-

vation, and my high tower," Psa. xviii. 1, 2. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" Psa. xxvii. 1. Such is the high privilege to which every believer may attain. The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people. Faith displaces fear in every member of the "little flock." Its appropriating power enables each of them with more or less emphasis to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

Oh wonderful words! The Lord Jehovah is my Shepherd! I, a creature of yesterday, yet the eternal God is my Keeper! I, a frail and dying mortal, yet the Self-existent is my Preserver! I, a sinner that have often strayed like a lost sheep, yet Jehovah is my Shepherd! Oh how good, how great, a Shepherd, is the Lord my Shepherd! His hand has led me all my life long unto this day! His bounty has supplied my wants! His longsuffering has borne with the perverseness of my heart! His gracious promises have spoken comfort to my soul! His everlasting arm has been around me for a defence! Oh for a heart to love my Shepherd as I ought! Marvellous has been his love towards me! He came from heaven to seek me. He called with his voice to find me. He took me on his shoulders to restore me. He brought me into his fold to secure me. He gave his own blood to cleanse me. He has sent his own Spirit to revive me. Shall I not then love him with my whole soul, and obey him through my whole life? My Shepherd is the mighty Lord who opposed himself to the devouring lion for my salvation! That Shepherd who gave his own life to rescue mine, is alive again, and is my Shepherd still! He regards

me as his ransomed sheep. He ever lives to claim his blood-bought property. He ever rules to rescue and defend it! Poor, then, and destitute as I am, my Shepherd is the possessor of all things! Unworthy and unstable as I am, my Shepherd is the gracious and the immutable Jehovah! Feeble and defenceless as I am, my Shepherd is the Almighty God! His fulness shall supply me. His wisdom shall direct me. His power shall preserve me. And into his everlasting fold he shall receive me, for the Lord is my Shepherd!

NO WANT.

VERSE 1.—*I shall not want.*

HAVING declared the joyful truth that the Lord was his Shepherd, the Psalmist proceeds to describe his own felicity as a member of the flock. So full is his sense of security and blessedness, that he stays not to specify any one particular form of his innumerable mercies, but at once, by a single and sententious negative, banishes every idea that any real evil can befall him, and appropriates to himself all needful good !

“I shall not want !” What an amazing declaration ! Does he deny that life is a chequered scene ? Does he not know that riches take unto themselves wings and flee away ? Has he forgotten that even conquerors have fallen, and that the mightiest of monarchs have begged their bread ? By no means. The Psalmist is neither ignorant nor forgetful of these facts ; but his confidence in God as his heavenly Shepherd, has raised him superior to all fear of privation. The changes and chances of this uncertain world he can calmly contemplate, and yet exclaim, “I shall not want.” But on what ground, it may be demanded, does he base this assertion ? We can without hesitation reply—“On the surest of all grounds.” Did he not immediately before declare, “The Lord is my Shepherd ?” And is it not both natural and appro-

priate to add, "I shall not want?" Imagine the opposite conclusion. How absurd, how contradictory, is it to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall be left to want!" Surely the most despondent of men would recoil from such a proposition! The statements it contains are destructive of each other!

Since then the Psalmist could affirm with truth, "The Lord is my Shepherd," we must conclude that he was fully warranted to add, "I shall not want." Nay, we may take still higher ground, and assert that he was bound to say so! Is not the less included in the greater? Whether is it easier to find an Almighty Shepherd for the sheep, or a little provision for its necessities? And does not the very name of shepherd imply that every manner of care shall be taken for the flock? Oh blessed necessity of faith! He who regards God as his Shepherd, is under an obligation to believe that he will never abandon him! To entertain any opposite sentiment would extremely dishonour his Divine Friend and Benefactor!

The second statement, then, of this verse, is a legitimate deduction from the first. Let every believer mark this fact. It is of the greatest importance to his peace of mind that he always remember it. Yea, to all men it is important. How happy would every child of Adam feel, were he able to say, "I shall not want!" Though his many toils and labours might not cease, yet certainly all his fears and anxieties would subside! Whosoever, then, would desire to be raised with David above the apprehension of want, must learn with him to know and to follow the good Shepherd, from whom alone this security proceeds!

When the Psalmist affirms that he shall "not want," he does not mean that prosperity and abundance shall

for ever attend him. He makes no positive declaration of this kind. He presumes not to determine what his earthly lot shall be ; but his confidence in the pastoral care of God enables him comfortably to conclude what it shall not be.—“I shall not want.” As if he had said, “Whatever may be the troubles and difficulties, the straits and changes, of my future life, I know my heavenly Shepherd will not withdraw his watchful care, nor withhold any blessing that shall be really needful either for my body or for my soul !”

There are two opposite extremes in human circumstances. On the one hand there is destitution ; and on the other there is superfluity. Each of these is attended by its own peculiar trials and temptations. The children of God in every age have been taught to deprecate these extremes. How instructive is the short prayer of Agur the son of Jakeh ! “Two things have I required of thee ; deny me them not before I die : remove far from me vanity and lies : give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with food convenient for me : lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord ? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain,” Prov. xxx. 7. This beautiful prayer furnishes us with a true exposition of this remarkable text. “I shall not want,” that is, I may not be always “full,” and possessed of “riches.” For these I do not pray, lest I be puffed up with “vanity,” and “deny” my Lord. But this I know, I shall not be left to pining “poverty.” My Shepherd will preserve me from being tempted to “steal,” and to utter “lies,” or to “take the name of my God in vain ;” for he will “feed me with food convenient for me” till my dying day ! Such we apprehend to be the compass and the import of this dec-

laration of the Psalmist. He knew on whom he relied. He was contented implicitly to follow in whatever paths his Shepherd led; for he knew that Shepherd's heart too well to fear that he would ever lead him into trouble, and then leave him destitute of help. No vain self-confidence, no presumptuous enthusiasm, dictated the words of David. He placed his whole dependance on the spontaneous good will and sovereign power of Him who had condescended to become his Shepherd. He knew that his ability was equal to his inclination to provide. The strong confidence here expressed is altogether different from that of the man who surveys his large stores laid up for many years, and then pours the flattering unction upon his soul, "Take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry," Luke xii. 19. Neither does it harmonize in the least degree with the sentiment of those, who, in the midst of abundance, cast all prudence and forethought to the winds, and seek to enhance their present festivity by the delusive hope that "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant," Isa. lvi. 12. On the contrary, it is a deliberate and well-weighed declaration which the Psalmist here makes. To him it appears no high and difficult attainment to cast the burden of his cares on God. He feels it to be equally his duty and his delight to do so. And it is designed alike to honour his Shepherd, and to gladden his own soul, that he here declares, "I shall not want!"

We ought not to forget that "want" is a comparative term. Those circumstances which one individual feels to be straitened and painful, may be considered by another as easy, and even affluent. The misapplied term more frequently meets us in the history of life than actual want itself. Men speak as they feel.

One man, accustomed to little, may want a single pound,—and another, habituated to abundance, may want a thousand! Each may declare, and that with truth, that he is in want. Yet neither of them may be enduring real or absolute want. The privation felt, may be only comparative. It may arise from their own over-anxious desire to regain a former position in society, or from their restless ambition to be exalted in the world. Thus, strange it is, a man brings himself to feel, and to speak, as if he suffered want, while at the same time he is in actual possession of enough to satisfy all his necessities! Pride and ambition make men poor indeed. The children of this world grasp at shadows, and miss the true riches of godly peace and contentment. The child of God must not give place to their feelings. He must not allow himself to be misled by the misapplied terms, the empty appearances, and the false maxims, of “this present evil world.” He is a stranger and a pilgrim on this earth, and having “food and raiment,” he must learn “therewith to be content.” The Christian should understand that poverty is no disgrace. Our blessed Saviour “had not where to lay his head.” His life on earth has honoured and adorned the poor man’s lot. Jesus of Nazareth was always poor, yet he never wanted. He lived on the providence of his heavenly Father, and never, in a single instance, did he perform a miracle to relieve his hunger. The believer in God may be very poor in this world’s estimation, but yet in his own he will be rich indeed, for he can say with David, “I shall not want”—The gifts which God withholds, I do not wish to possess.—The gifts he gives are more than I deserve!

Thus the expression of the Psalmist refers not so

much to the outward circumstance, as to the inward feeling that accompanies it. He who is contented with everything that is allotted to him, feels no want. His portion may be less, or it may be more, than others enjoy, but still it is enough for the present to a contented mind. The future is left to God. "The poor committeth himself unto thee." In the time of need God will deliver. In the moment of extremity the Shepherd will provide. And as we journey onwards, his wisdom and his bounty will supply. He alone knows the amount that is best for us to be intrusted with. And though from day to day he may keep us dependant upon himself, yet from day to day let us go on believing that he will not fail us.

In the lowest and most afflicted condition, the believer has been enabled by the Spirit of grace to maintain a cheerful dependance upon God. One of the poor members of the flock of Christ was reduced to circumstances of the greatest poverty in his old age, and yet he never murmured. "You must be badly off," said a kind-hearted neighbour to him one day as they met upon the road, "you must be badly off; and I don't know how an old man like you can maintain yourself and your wife; yet you are always cheerful!" "Oh, no!" he replied, "we are not badly off. I have a rich Father, and he does not suffer me to want." "What! your father not dead yet! he must be very old indeed!" "Oh!" said he, "my Father never dies, and he always takes care of me!" This aged Christian was a daily pensioner on the providence of his God. His struggles and his poverty were known to all; but his own declaration was, that he never wanted what was absolutely necessary. The days of his greatest straits were the days of his most signal and

timely deliverances. When old age benumbed the hand of his industry, the Lord extended to him the hand of charity. And often has he gone forth from his scanty breakfast, not knowing from what earthly source his next meal was to be obtained. But yet with David he could rely on his Shepherd's care, and say, "I shall not want;" and as certainly as he trusted in God, so surely, in some unexpected manner, was his necessity supplied.

The Lord demands our confidence. "Have faith in God." Who ever trusted in him and was forsaken? Unbelief deprives us of his blessings. When we doubt our Shepherd's care, no marvel that the evil we greatly fear comes upon us. It is written, "He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief," Matt. xiii. 58. It is a noble act of faith to say, "I shall not want." God honours that confidence which honours him. He answers it with blessings. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways," Isa. lxiv. 5. Oh animating thought! the Father in heaven responding to his earthly child! the great God meeting his feeble creature! Often, and strikingly, has this been verified in the experience of the believing poor. The long-tried and consistent piety of the afflicted wife of a poor labourer, had attracted the regard of her wealthier neighbours. She was one of those happy Christians, whose holy cheerfulness of manner adorn their profession of the gospel. She "rejoiced," and "wrought righteousness," and "remembered the Lord in his ways." She had gained the esteem of all who knew her, and now that a slow but sure decline rendered her incapable of contributing to her support, some pious friends agreed together to provide her regularly with those

little comforts which were so necessary to her sinking condition. The Lord thus met her necessity by their instrumentality. But she knew not that he had awakened this thought within the hearts of any of them. Her own was stayed upon the heart of her God. As she stood one afternoon in her humble doorway to breathe the balmy air, she observed three objects of misery soliciting alms in the street. Her heart pitied the famished mother and her two tattered children; but all the money that she possessed was her last and only sixpence. Every article of provision in the house had been already consumed. Without delay or hesitation, however, she drew from her pocket the little coin which was needed for her own necessities, and freely bestowed it on the widow and the fatherless. She considered that all her own wants for the day had been supplied, and that she ought not to be distrustful for the morrow. "I have a heavenly Friend," she said within herself, "to provide for me; and, perhaps, this poor woman does not know the God that is above.—I have no one to think of; she has these two children to struggle for.—I know my own need, but they are more needy than me!" That very evening the individual deputed by her unknown friends, visited her dwelling to inform her of their kind determination; and great was her astonishment and gratitude, to hear that a sum double the amount she had that day given to the poor wanderers, was to be her daily allowance during the remainder of her life. It pleased the Lord to spare her for two years, as she declared, "in plenty and comfort;" thus making her a living testimony to the faithfulness of the Scripture declaration, "Thou meetest him (her) that rejoiceth, and worketh righteousness: those that remember thee in thy ways!"

To trust in God, resting satisfied with his allotments, is the true secret of christian happiness. A contented mind has a continual feast. Even a worldly man, by calm contentment, enjoys peace and tranquillity in those circumstances which prove distressing to others of an opposite disposition. He is evidently a gainer over them. But when contentment is joined with godliness it is "great gain." "We brought nothing into this world," says the Apostle, "and it is certain we can carry nothing out: and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content," 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8. The good Shepherd appoints to each of his flock their proper quantity and quality of pasture. The sheep must leave all things to the judgment of their Shepherd. We assume his office, we make ourselves our own God, when we say, or think, that we ought to have more health, more wealth, more honour, more enjoyments, than are allotted to us. If we would not be infidels, we must believe that not a hair of our head falls to the ground without the permission of God! Nothing can happen to the believer in this present life which is not regulated by unerring wisdom. It is not God's allotment, but our own dissatisfaction, that is the true cause of much of our disquietude. The fearful, anxious, Christian would do well to demand of himself what the Saviour meant, when he assumed the title of a "Shepherd," yea, of a "good Shepherd." Did he not thereby declare both his ability and his willingness to fulfil all the duties of that office? To call Christ our Shepherd, and not to believe that he will provide for us—to doubt whether he will be near us in troubles—to fear lest he may leave us to want, and not defend us in dangers, are so many contradictions. Our lips affirm that he is our Shep-

herd, but our doubts and fears, our misgivings and anxieties, declare that he is not our Shepherd. We speak indeed, as if he were our friend, but we feel and live and act as if his friendship were not real! The lurking distrust we entertain, accuses this Shepherd of insincerity and unfaithfulness, in undertaking an office, the duties of which he is not careful to fulfil. Flee then, O Christian, from such impiety and wickedness. Put away all anxious doubts and fears. Banish every thought and feeling which sets thee in opposition to thy Shepherd. Cultivate contentment. Subdue covetousness. Abhor murmuring and fretfulness. Be satisfied with thy lot. Set not thy heart upon an earthly portion, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things needful for thee shall be added unto thee.

When the Psalmist affirmed, "I shall not want," his best affections were withdrawn from the glittering toys of a perishing world. God had given him great and unexpected exaltation, yet he sought not great things for himself. Though the youngest of the sons of Jesse, he had been called from attending the flocks of his father, to be the deliverer of his king and country. But amidst all the pomp and splendour with which he was welcomed at the court of Saul, it was his highest ambition to remain within the fold of the Shepherd of Israel, and to share in the portion of his "little flock." Choosing thus the "better portion," he knew that it should not be taken away from him. He felt convinced that whatever gifts or graces, temporal benefits, or spiritual blessings, were essential to his welfare, would be freely bestowed upon him. He committed all his desires to God by prayer: and he left all his concerns to him by faith.

He was willing to be, whatever God willed that he should be. If poverty was appointed, he would not seek riches; if wealth were destined for him, he would not wish for the reverse. He felt willing to be elevated or depressed in worldly estimation, as might be most conducive to the glory of his God. This is the blessed state of feeling which all Christians ought incessantly to aim after. It is the privileged position of the people of God. None can attain to it but the children of faith. Trust in God, is an unfailing source of happiness in all, and in spite of all, outward circumstances. Prosperity does not overjoy, and adversity cannot overwhelm, the true believer. "Not that I speak in respect of want," says the Apostle, "for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," Phil. iv. 11—13.

Alas! how many are there who repudiate this example of the Apostle! They have not learned, and they are not willing to learn, contentment in whatsoever state they are. They would know how to abound, but they refuse to learn how to be abased. They vainly persuade themselves that they shall be more happy, more free to serve God, if only they possessed somewhat more of this world's goods. They desire to be richer than God has made them. But the Scriptures of truth have given us this faithful warning, "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is the (or a) root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness," 1 Tim. vi. 9—11. These constitute the true riches. They are the soul's wealth; increasing in their use, and unfading in their nature. Upon the acquisition of such treasure, no human heart can be too inordinately set. Their possession injures not, but blesses. Covetousness is here transformed into a virtue. But the inordinate desire of this world's riches is sinful in itself, and productive of "all manner of evil." The Scripture injunctions on this subject are decisive. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world," 1 John ii. 15, 16.

To be raised above the fear of want by committing ourselves to the care of the good Shepherd, or by placing our confidence in worldly property, are two distinct and very opposite things. The confidence in the former case, appears to the natural man to be hard and difficult, if not unreasonable and impossible: in the latter it appears to be natural, easy, and consistent. It requires, however, no lengthened argument to prove that he who relies on the promise of God for the supply of his temporal wants, possesses an infinitely greater security, than the individual who confides in his accumulated wealth. The ablest financiers admit that there must be appended to their most choice investments, this felt or expressed proviso—"So

far as human affairs can be secure." Indeed the mutability of all earthly conditions so forces itself upon the minds of men, that it is made the basis of their wisest speculations. He who calculates the changes of life most accurately, is esteemed the most sagacious. And the man who best guards himself against loss, is regarded as the most prudent. Insurance against the uncertainties of the world in which we live, is an established business; and, beyond every other, exercises the calculation, the forethought, and the intellectual powers of man.

Since then no absolute security against want can be found on earth, it necessarily follows, that he who trusts in God is the most wise and prudent man. Who dare deny that the promise of the living God is an absolute security? Hear what gracious declarations are scattered everywhere throughout his holy word! "Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy: to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine," Psa. xxxiii. 19. "O fear the Lord ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing," Psa. xxxiv. 9, 10. "Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed," Psa. xxxvii. 3. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee: so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me," Heb. xiii. 5, 6. "In Christ Jesus the promises of God are all yea and amen," 2 Cor. i. 20. The good Shepherd has ratified them to his flock. He has

called upon its poorest and feeblest members to trust in God, and has encouraged each of them to exercise habitually an unwavering faith and say, "I shall not want."

When the believer is tempted to give way to distrustful thoughts, let him turn to the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, and mark his Saviour's words of strong encouragement. Can language be more simple, or declarations more plain? What clearer arguments, or stronger assurances, would man require? What hesitation can there be in answering these five interrogations? "Is not the life more than meat?—Is not the body more than raiment?—Are ye not much better than the fowls of the air?—Who by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?—If God so richly clothe the grass of the field, shall he not much more clothe you?" These five interrogations put every doubt to shame, and reduce every cavil to an absurdity. Be not then driven about, O Christian, with earth-born cares. Let doubts and fears, and anxious thoughts, flee away as mists before the risen sun. Let these simple facts—these every-day truths—that you are alive—that you have a body—that the birds of the air around you are supplied with food—and that the grass and flowers beneath your feet are clothed with loveliness—be arguments and tokens to you of the love, the wisdom, and the resources, of that God who will also supply you with food, and cover you with raiment. The blessed Saviour has positively affirmed that our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things. How conclusive is the argument which he grounds upon that fact! "Take therefore no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" ver. 31.

His meaning is, not that we should take "no thought," no interest whatever; but, as the Greek term more properly instructs us, that we should take "no anxious thought"—harbour no harassing, distracting, thoughts, which disturb our communion with God, or hinder us in the calm and diligent discharge of daily duty. Suffer not then, O afflicted Christian, the loss of wealth to entail also the loss of faith and trust in God, the loss of serenity and contentment of spirit. Be master over yourself, if you cannot be master over your circumstances. Bend your will to your condition, or your condition will bend it against God!

We have spoken chiefly of temporal blessings, but the words of the Psalmist are inclusive also of those of a spiritual nature. As the following verses of the psalm will bring these immediately under our attention, it seemed necessary here to enlarge on the too much neglected fact, that the character of a shepherd, in which God has graciously revealed himself, furnishes an assurance to his people that their temporal necessities shall be provided for. A strange incongruity exists in the professing church in reference to this subject. Many appear to be able to trust God with their spiritual interests, who yet do not confide in him for the supply of their bodily wants. We hear them declare that they look to God for the forgiveness of their sins, the sanctification of their natures, and the salvation of their souls; but that they cannot exercise the same faith in reference to their daily bread, or their own and their families' temporal welfare. This is an unhealthy state of heart. The real difficulty ought to lie in trusting God for eternal blessings, which are in themselves so precious, and are, at the same time, so unattainable by human agency. A little industry

can more readily provide food and raiment for the body, than our religious exercises can adorn the soul with peace and holiness. Great then may be our delusion. We may regard that as our faith, and trust in God, which is in fact only credulity or indifference. The wants of the soul are not so keenly and so quickly felt as are those of the body. Spiritual blessings are more dim and distant to our apprehension. Do we hunger and thirst after righteousness, with as great intensity as we desire the meat that perisheth? Who constantly and decidedly prefer to be endowed with lowliness of mind, purity of thought, gentleness of disposition, and tenderness of conscience, rather than with gold and silver, with food and raiment? If then the things of the world and the flesh be regarded as more indispensable than the things of heaven and the soul, no marvel that men imagine it easier to exercise faith as to their spiritual, than as to their temporal, wants. It is a great mistake, however, to call it faith. It is presumption as to things temporal, and indifference to things eternal. To trust God only for those things in which we ourselves are least interested, is in reality not to trust him at all. Such a state of mind originates in ignorance of God as a Father and as a Shepherd. A father's care extends alike to the body and to the soul of his child. A shepherd's care includes all the wants and interests of his flock. That heavenly Father who has given to us a body and a soul, does he not delight to care for both? Oh! certainly, beyond all question, the love of God embraces all our wants. His fatherly heart sympathizes both in the corporal and the spiritual necessities of his children. And surely it can only be from ignorance of him as our Shepherd, and from forgetfulness of what he has

done and suffered on our behalf, that any member of his flock can be deprived of the happiness which David experienced when he said, in reference to his temporal and his spiritual necessities, "I shall not want."

Happy and blessed is the true believer! He can look upward and exclaim, "I shall not want"—for the Lord Jehovah is my Shepherd! He who sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and to whom all power in heaven and earth belongs, invites me to repose with confidence in His care; and promises to provide whatsoever may be necessary for my body and for my soul, for my support in time, and for my happiness in eternity!

Happy and blessed is the true believer! He can look downward and exclaim, "I shall not want!" This earth on which I tread is full of the goodness of the Lord. He clothes these fields with beauty, and covers them with abundance. He provides for the fowls of the air, for the fishes of the sea, for the beasts of the field, and for the meanest of creeping things. This rich Provider for the whole creation, will much more certainly provide for me, his intelligent and redeemed creature!

Happy and blessed is the true believer! He can look inward and exclaim, "I shall not want!" He who has kindled in my soul these new and heavenly desires; who has taught me to abhor sin and to hunger after righteousness; who has inclined me by his Spirit to love his name, to delight in his service, and to sigh for greater conformity to his image, will perfect that which concerneth me, and will abundantly satisfy every holy aspiration of my heart!

Happy and blessed is the true believer! He can look backward and exclaim, "I shall not want!" In-

significant and unworthy as I was, the good Shepherd sought my lost and wandering soul. Innumerable and aggravated as were my trespasses, he shed his precious blood to secure for me a full and free forgiveness. His Spirit deigned to visit my thoughtless heart. His providence has strengthened my weakness, and supplied my wants ever since I was born: and insignificant and unworthy though I still am, He will not fail to strengthen and to supply me in every time of need!

Happy and blessed is the true believer! He can look forward and exclaim, "I shall not want!" Pressing as my necessities may become—irksome and manifold as may be the duties to which I shall be called—painful, complicated, and prolonged, as may prove the trials that await me, my Shepherd has promised that "as my day is so my strength shall be." He enables me with calmness to contemplate the vicissitudes of time, the solemnities of death, and the responsibilities of judgment; for the Lord Jehovah shall be my friend in every vicissitude—that Friend shall be my Shepherd through the dark valley—that Shepherd shall be my Judge in the awful day—and that Judge shall pronounce my everlasting acquittal: nor mine alone;—but for all those also who love his appearing he shall say, "For these my brethren, I died. Their sins are blotted out by my blood. Their persons are justified through my righteousness. Their souls are sanctified by my Spirit. Come, ye blessed children of my Father: inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world!"

Happy and blessed is the true believer! He can look onward for ever and exclaim, "I SHALL NOT WANT!" He soars in thought above the horizon of

men. With eagle eye he looks down the vista of time, to gaze upon the glories which surround the threshold of eternity. He beholds by faith the advent of his Lord—the splendour of the attendant seraphs—the resurrection of the sleeping, and the transfiguration of the living, saints—their spiritual, glorified, and immortal, bodies—the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem—the innumerable company of angels—the reign of universal righteousness—the kingdom of peace, and purity, and power—and the effulgent presence of Him at whose right hand is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore! He contemplates with delight the removal of all sin,—the subjugation of every enemy,—the delivering up of the kingdom to the Father,—and God all in all! Thus, onward and onward, can the believer gaze, and exclaim with wonder, and gratitude, and adoration, “I SHALL NEVER WANT!”—The Lord Jesus shall be my Shepherd—the ransomed flock shall be my companions—heaven shall be my fold—and God himself shall be my portion, for ever and for evermore!

GREEN PASTURES.

VERSE 2.—*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*

WHAT a beautiful picture is here presented to our view! The active care, and generous kindness, of a provident Shepherd, and the posture, and the pasture, of a happy flock are strikingly portrayed! The luxuriant herbage to which he had conducted them, has abundantly satisfied their desires; and now, beneath a refreshing shade in the midst of it, he has invited them to repose! There is the Shepherd faithfully guarding his flock! and there are his sheep peacefully resting, without any sensation of want to annoy, and quietly reclining without any fear of danger to disturb! The flock is in the height of enjoyment! And the pious Psalmist, as if gazing upon the scene, recognises his Saviour in this shepherd, and congratulates himself as a member of his flock, and a partaker of its happiness. With fervent gratitude he thus acknowledges the great, the undeserved, goodness of his Shepherd towards him, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures!"

It was then no empty boast which David uttered when he affirmed, "I shall not want." He knew the love and rich resources of his heavenly Shepherd. He felt convinced that the good Pastor not only under-

stood what provision was necessary for his flock ; but also that he always supplied them in the most abundant manner. And now he declares that he had already brought him into the full enjoyment of those spiritual privileges, which nourish and sustain his soul, so that he can compare himself to a sheep lying down in "green pastures." In the marginal translation these are called "pastures of tender grass:" and, in the language of the original, they are expressively described as "pastures of budding grass." It is not to a field of dry and withered herbage—a pasture of decaying stubble—that The Good Shepherd conducts his flock. On the contrary, his pastures are fresh and green ; they are tender and ever-budding !

By this instructive metaphor, the Psalmist would describe to us the fulness and richness of spiritual provision, which his soul enjoyed under the pastoral care of the Lord Jehovah. His attentive superintendence ; his ever-liberal, ever-active, kindness, are gratefully acknowledged by these words, "He maketh me : " as if he had said, "But for my Shepherd's care I could not have found this pasturage : But for his goodness and protection I could neither enjoy its sweetness, nor lie down in its abundance !" The pasture he says is "green and budding," that is, it is fresh and unfailing in its nature, rich, and good, and tender in its quality. By the posture of "lying down" therein, he represents the rest and satisfaction, the safety and the peace, which he experienced ; and teaches us that the quantity of the pasture is more than sufficient for all the members of the flock.

The spiritual pastures, in which the nourishment of the sheep of the good Shepherd is contained, are the word of God, and the ordinances of his grace. These

are admirably adapted to their condition and their wants. As tender grass is suited to nourish and sustain the natural life of the sheep, so are the sacred Scriptures, and the services of religion, peculiarly fitted to preserve and to strengthen the life of our souls.

The field of Scripture truth is indeed a green and ample pasturage! How fresh and pleasant! How rich and varied! How suitable and how satisfying! As food is to the body, so is truth to the spirit, of man. The word of God is the only depositary of eternal truth: and the blessed Saviour has declared that "man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," Matt. iv. 4. Separated from truth, every created spirit sinks in moral death. The great adversary of God and man is not only thus dead himself, but is the cause of similar death thereby to others. "He was a murderer from the beginning," said our Lord to the Jews, "and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it," John viii. 44. To counteract the soul-destroying lie of Satan, is the grand object of the Scriptures. As light to darkness, as medicine to disease, as the antidote to poison, as life to death, so is the truth of God to the lie of Satan. "The words that I speak unto you," said our Lord, "they are spirit and they are life," John vi. 63. "The excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it," Eccles. vii. 12. "And this is life eternal to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent," John xvii. 3.

The knowledge of the God of truth, is nowhere to be found but in the Scriptures of truth. "Search the

Scriptures," said our Lord, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me," John v. 39. The holy Bible alone is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, 2 Tim. iii. 17. What book is there in the whole compass of human learning, which can confer the same transcendent blessing? In the hemisphere of literature, the Bible is the sun, and the writings of men shine forth out of darkness only by the reflection of its rays! The writings of the olden divines abound with most glowing eulogiums of the sacred Scriptures. "The holy Bible," says one, "is a spiritual paradise, and the book of Psalms is the tree of life in the midst!" Others exclaim, "the Psalms are a jewel-cluster, made up of the gold of doctrine, the pearls of comfort, and the gems of prayer!" "The holy Scriptures are God's treasure-house; wherein are found all things needful for us to see, to hear, to learn, and to believe, necessary for the attainment of eternal life!" "In the holy Scriptures are doctrines most divine—prophecies most certain—laws most holy, just, and good—covenants betwixt God and man most gracious—promises most precious—privileges most ample—providences most wonderful—ordinances most comfortable and soul reviving: here whatsoever is taught is truth—whatsoever is commanded is good—whatsoever is promised is happiness!" What shall we add in commendation of this holy book? It is the tree of the knowledge of good, without any admixture of evil. It is as the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, and the leaves thereof are for the healing of the nations. It is a garden of the most lovely flowers, and the most delicious fruits. The holy Bible is the well of truth, and faith is the vessel that draws

up its refreshing waters. It is a mirror, in which we behold the Almighty God in his beloved Son, as the forgiver of sin, and the reconciler of sinners! In these Scriptures alone are to be found the most perfect truth—the surest promises—the most gracious invitations—and the wisest counsels! Here are praises without flattery—reproofs without asperity—and love that knows no change! Here are histories without falsehoods—records without mistakes—and memoirs without partialities! “The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, and purified seven times,” Psa. xii. 6. The volume of truth is the “field,” wherein that “hidden treasure” lies, which is infinitely more desirable than the largest stores of corn and wine, more valuable than the richest mines of gold and silver, or the most precious stones. Here are treasures of mercy and grace—treasures of pardon and peace—and treasures of love and joy! Here are treasures of wisdom and strength—treasures of sanctification and righteousness—and treasures of everlasting life and salvation!

If the Christian be a “stranger,” here is his citizenship declared to him. If he be a “pilgrim,” here is his staff provided for him. If he be a “traveller,” here is his guide. If he be a voyager, here is his chart. If he be a soldier, here is his spiritual armoury,—the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, the sandals of peace, and the girdle of truth—the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation! Whatsoever the Christian be, or in whatever circumstances, he will find in the word of the living God a most suitable and seasonable portion! It is as food for the hungry, and water for the thirsty: medicine for the sick, and a cordial to the faint. It gives riches to

the poor, and a blessing without sorrow to the rich. It gives sight to the blind, strength to the weak, instruction to the living, and consolation to the dying ! Safely may we affirm that no believer ever searched the sacred Scriptures in vain. When darkness surrounds us, here we see a light shining upon our path. When perplexity unsettles us, we find here a counsellor who directs us with unerring wisdom. When the remembrance of sin sinks us in despondency, the Scriptures assure us that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin. When the believer is bereaved of the pious friends he loved, he is here comforted by the hope that he and they shall again be reunited for ever ! Thus whatever be the circumstances of the Christian, the word of God is as "green pastures" to his soul ! The testimony of the Psalmist to the excellence and sufficiency of the holy word, is most complete. "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul : the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever : the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey, and the honey comb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned ; and in keeping of them there is great reward," *Psa. xix. 7—11.*

The "good" and "great" Shepherd of the sheep, has more than one pasture for his flock. The Psalmist here speaks in the plural number—"green pastures." A provident Shepherd conducts his flock from one field to another, and gives them a pleasant diversity of food. Thus their appetite is never cloyed—their health and

strength are preserved—and their spirits are ever cheerful and buoyant. So is it with the flock of the good Shepherd. They are not confined to one only mean of grace and spiritual refreshment. Oh no! Their Shepherd is wise, and provident, and liberal. He has appointed various means of grace for the nourishment and prosperity of their souls. To these he leads his flock, and there he causes them to lie down in the abundance of his blessing. The holy Sabbath—the house of the Lord—the preaching of his word—the melody of psalms—the offering up of prayers—the administration of the sacraments, are “green pastures” where the Shepherd feeds his flock. Both family and social prayer, the Lord also vouchsafes to bless as means of grace and gladness to his people. How often have all these, in their respective seasons, proved refreshing to the weary, and satisfying to the hungry, soul! What comfort, what encouragement, what instruction, have we not derived from them in the moments of our greatest need! Who would not “call the sabbath a delight, holy of the Lord, and honourable?” “I was glad,” the Psalmist cries, “when they said unto me; Let us go into the house of the Lord.” “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” How often has the believer experienced in the sanctuary of the Lord, that “where two or three are gathered together” in his name, there is he in the midst of them! It is the presence of the Lord in his church, in his word, and in his ordinances, by the Holy Spirit, that makes them green pastures to the soul. The types and ceremonies, the histories and prophecies of the Old Testament were no empty and unmeaning things. They

exhibited a living and life-giving Saviour to the saints. The miracles and the doctrines, the precepts, the promises, and the ordinances, of the New Testament, are redolent with Divine goodness. We feel satisfied with the fatness of God's house. We are made to "lie down" as in "green pastures." God is known, and felt, and loved! His presence is realized! His faithfulness is proved! His power is experienced! His mercy is enjoyed!

So rich and ample, so suitable and adapted to the wants of the soul, are the spiritual pastures of the good Shepherd, that the Psalmist expresses his satisfaction with them, by the appropriate figure of a sheep "*lying down*" in green pastures. There its hunger is appeased: its wants are satisfied; it reclines and is at rest! Such is the happy position of the true believer. It is his privilege to feed and to "lie down" in the green pastures of his Spiritual Shepherd, that ever gracious Lord, who "satiates the weary soul, and replenishes every sorrowful soul." The Psalmist fully enjoyed this replenishing. He knew the largeness and the richness of heavenly provision. "My soul," he declares, "shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness: and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches," Psal. lxxiii. 5. Meditation is the "*lying down*" of the soul—the ruminating of its heavenly food. The mind fixes its attention on things divine. We recall the truths, and promises, and consolations, of Scripture. We re-feel the impressions that were produced. We rekindle the emotions that were awakened. The soul takes in religion to its inner being. Truth becomes a part of its nature: and with the God of truth it feels

that it possesses a real, intimate, and living relationship. Thus the spirit of the believer is invigorated. Every holy thought is deepened. Every gracious disposition is strengthened. We see sin to be exceeding sinful. We feel the burden of it to be intolerable. Confidence in self is loosened, and confidence in the Saviour is increased. The more we meditate on his love to us, the more fervent does our love to him become. Infinite obligations lay us under an infinite debt of gratitude. We feel that we cannot love him as we ought, or as we desire. His praises cannot be told, and yet we rejoice to utter them in our highest strains. We speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs : singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord. And while we are thus musing, the holy calm, and the heavenly satisfaction, within our breasts, enable us to testify with the Psalmist, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."

Meditation is both the privilege and the duty of the believer. It is the holy and the healthful digestion of his spiritual food. Without this the means of grace cannot nourish or refresh the soul. "From the uttermost parts of the earth we may hear songs, even glory to the righteous;" and yet from lack of prayer and meditation be compelled to cry out, "My leanness, my leanness. Woe unto me!" Isa. xxiv. 16. This, alas ! is the case with multitudes in the professing church. They read the sacred page, and they attend the ministrations of the sanctuary ; but they are not equally diligent in the duties of the closet. Yet from year to year they wonder why all they read and hear procures so little profit to their souls. The fault lies inward. Their spiritual appetite is de-

praved, and every addition of the most wholesome food only increases the disease. Unless the "heart be *sound* in the statutes" of the Lord, our "leanness" will continually cause us to be "ashamed." In an "honest and good heart" we must not only receive the word, but "*keep*" it. The soul is preserved in a healthy condition by constant prayer and daily meditation. This, however, is a self-denying and painstaking work. Man naturally loves it not. Gladly and perseveringly will he go from one means of grace to another. He finds pleasure in the excitements of social worship. He takes delight in listening to pulpit eloquence. But to retire within himself for a season—to make his own breast his church—conscience the preacher—and every thought and feeling the audience—he accounts a task as dull as it is distasteful! The silly, inconsiderate sheep delight to roam. Even through mid-day heat they will range from pasture to pasture—tasting as they go—till they sink under their own exhaustion. The office of the shepherd, therefore, is to "make" his sheep lie down. He conducts them to the shady spots within their pasturage, and thus invites them to refreshing rest. The good Shepherd performs this office for all the members of his flock. By his gracious Spirit in their hearts, and by his timely providences in their lives, he gives them periods of repose. The satisfaction and the joy which they experience under the Divine Comforter, dispose them to lie down with delight in the spiritual pastures. The believer exclaims, "It is good for me to draw near unto God."—"Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth."—"I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope." Such

was the experience of the saints of old. They found God to be the only true resting-place for their souls. Converse with him, they regarded as the sweetest refreshment of their spirits. "I have esteemed," said the patriarch Job, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." Jeremiah willingly records a similar testimony for himself: "Thy words were found and I did eat them: and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart." The Psalmist, too, seems never to have been weary of rehearsing the delight which he experienced in meditating upon God. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste: yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth."—"I rejoice at thy word as one that findeth great spoil."—"The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."—"Oh, how love I thy law: it is my meditation all the day."—"Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart."

The repose of soul which these ancient believers experienced in the green pastures of the good Shepherd, is the common privilege of every member of his flock. Hear his gracious invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The flock of Christ are living in an unquiet world, and trials befall them as they journey through it. Peace in mere external circumstances they cannot find. Their souls languish and would expire amidst the emptiness of earthly things. How delightful to the Christian, when worn with the cares and the anxieties of life, to retire to these green pastures! How refreshing to the spirit which the business and the bustle of the world have harassed, to "return" to the resting-place of the good Shepherd!

The Pastor welcomes his troubled sheep to his ever-verdant pastures. "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God," Ezek. xxxiv. 15. The volume of truth is as a "green" and never-failing field. The pastures of prayer and praise are ever budding with refreshment. To these the believer returns again and again, and finds them sweet and suitable to his taste. In the ever-changing circumstances of his lot, and at the several stages of his progress, he can lie down with satisfaction therein, and find abundance and repose. The instructions of truth, the consolations of religion, display a fadeless bloom, because they possess an everlasting virtue. Turn to them at whatever time; return to them with whatever frequency, they shall always be found budding with new and seasonable refreshment.

Is this thy experience, O Christian reader? Hast thou been brought into these "green pastures?" Dost thou love them? Is the Bible of inestimable value in thy apprehension? Is it thy book of life?—thy soul's most precious nourishment? Dost thou prize all the ordinances of religion, and diligently cultivate every means of grace in private and in public? Thou art an immortal creature, and thy God has richly given to thee the food of immortality. Does it ever seem to thee as dry and withered herbage? Or is it always green and budding in thy estimation? Oh, pray earnestly to preserve thy relish for the pastures of the good Shepherd! Guard against everything that would lessen thy delight in the holy volume, and the privileges of prayer! Great indeed is the moral sickness when the spiritual appetite has declined. Oh, sad, sad state, when the book of truth is opened, or the knee is bent before the throne of grace, with a cold

and languid heart! Such was not the case with David: his words denote the full and holy satisfaction with which he contemplated and enjoyed his spiritual privileges. Hast thou been made, O reader, to "*lie down*" like him in these green pastures? Canst thou truly say, "My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when I meditate on God in the watches of the night?" Thy soul is in a healthy condition when it thus feels and speaks. Meditation is a wholesome act. Without it all the means of grace fail of their effect. A ruminating flock is a prospering flock. Meditation should invariably attend all our readings of God's word, and every act of private and of public devotion. The children of God in all ages have carefully observed it. "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the even-tide." The Psalmist affirms, "I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate, also, of all thy work, and talk of thy doings." Timothy was exhorted to "meditate upon these things, and to give himself wholly to them." Be these thy examples, O Christian. Give thyself to holy meditation. Ask thy Shepherd to make thee to lie down in his green pastures. Let the word of inspiration be thy daily study. Peruse it with a devotional spirit. Turn not lightly from one portion to another of the holy volume. Meditate on every word. Each verse says, "I have a message from God unto thee." Consider that message. Let it be engraven on thy heart. Ponder every precept. Weigh every threatening. Remember every promise. Let the "words which God commands thee be in thine heart . . . when thou sittest in thine house, when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Feed thy soul

continually upon the heavenly food. Let the word of Christ dwell in thee richly in all wisdom. The Bible is full of God. Think on Him as therein revealed, and thou shalt say with David, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord," Psa. civ. 34.

In the secret closet, in the public congregation, and at the sacramental feast, let the words of thy mouth be accompanied by the meditations of thy heart. The King of heaven condescends to give thee audience at the throne of grace. Great is the guilt of a heedless approach unto God. Therefore, at all times seek to be "in the Spirit," and especially "on the Lord's day." Be not rash with thy mouth to utter anything before God. "Offer not the sacrifice of fools," but "*consider!*" Hasten not to the sanctuary without a due preparation of thy heart. Seek not to meet with man, but with the living God. Pour out thy whole heart before him, and ponder well all thy petitions. Lay home upon thy conscience the word of truth. Let it be a discernor of the thoughts and intents of thy heart. Haste not away from the house of prayer to thy table, but to thy closet. Stay not till thy good impressions be effaced by frivolous conversation with friends or neighbours. Seek, quickly seek, to deepen and secure them by converse with thy God, and with thine own soul. Give thyself rest, O Christian, a holy rest. "Commune with thine own heart" daily, nightly, and "be still." Seasons of spiritual lying down are necessary to eternal health. Seek to enter into the full enjoyment of thy Christian privileges: and to derive from them that full and suitable nourishment which by the Spirit they will impart. These green pastures are ever open to thee. Lie down continually

therein. "This is the rest wherewith" the good Shepherd "causeth the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing!" None of his flock are excluded from it. The weakest, the poorest, the most unworthy, are invited, and shall each be made welcome. From the beginning of the world to its termination it shall be recorded of all the members of his fold, "They did all eat the same spiritual meat," 1 Cor. x. 3; they were all "made to lie down" in the same "green" and budding "pastures!"

STILL WATERS.

VERSE 2.—*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*

SUCH is the second grateful testimony of the Psalmist. He rejoices to record the unremitting care of the Lord his Shepherd, and the full and varied provision which he has made for his flock. Food, even the most excellent and abundant, cannot of itself satisfy every want. The pastures may indeed be "green" by reason of dews in the night, but, destitute of water, the sheep will languish and expire. A prudent shepherd, therefore, will not only cause his flock to feed, and to lie down, amid luxuriant herbage, but he will likewise conduct them to the copious current of refreshing streams. He knows that thirst is the most insupportable of all natural cravings: and regards it as one of his chief duties to secure his flock at all times against its distressing and dangerous effects. Never, by any means, does he place them in circumstances where this great necessary of life lies beyond their reach. On the contrary, he diligently searches for those districts where springs, or wells, or rivers abound; and carefully selects them for the pasturing of his flocks. He may, indeed, remove his sheep from field to field, or from one portion of country to another; but still he invariably leads them in the vicinity of that refreshment which is alike indispensable to their

health and their existence. These good offices of a shepherd, David had personally discharged. He knew what anxiety and care were necessary to provide for a flock continual and abundant supplies of water. And now, when he speaks of himself as enjoying the superintendence of a heavenly Shepherd, he thankfully acknowledges his own spiritual experience of a similar kindness at his hands, "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

The Shepherd of Israel has a large and numerous flock under his charge. He has engaged to conduct them to the heavenly Canaan, without the loss of the feeblest sheep, or of the most tender lamb. The territory of this world which they must traverse is to them as a desert and a wilderness. Its arid sands, its barren heaths, its entangling forests, its rocky mountains, furnish neither the nourishment nor the shelter which his flock require, and threaten them also as they pass with divers kinds of deaths. It is only, therefore, by the utmost tenderness and the most vigilant care on the part of the Shepherd, that they can be preserved to their journey's end. At one time he tarries with them lest weariness may injure; and "makes them to lie down in the green pastures" which he has prepared, that they may recover strength. At another he leads them diligently forward, and suffers them not to linger on the road. In the roughest parts "he carries the lambs in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with young." But ever and anon he keeps them within reach of a peaceful and refreshing stream. In its vicinity they will meet with fewer obstacles, and more level and fertile plains. And by oft "drinking of this brook by the way," they will lift up their heads refreshed, and go on their course with

vigour. This placid stream flows ever parallel with the path of righteousness ; and, as that path winds onward, its current also winds, and with each turning of the road flows gently forward. Should any member of the flock deviate from the appointed path, he would soon bitterly experience that he had lost sight of the stream of peace. The insatiable thirst within, no other waters could assuage. So long, however, as he followed in the footsteps of the good Shepherd, so long would he have reason to acknowledge, with a grateful heart, that he invariably led him beside the still waters.

Water is familiarly known to be a scriptural emblem of the Holy Spirit. We can, therefore, be at no loss to understand the meaning of the Psalmist in this descriptive statement. He evidently alludes to that heavenly peace, those inward calms, those sweet refreshments of soul, which it is the privilege of the believer to enjoy through the gracious Spirit of the living God, the promised Comforter. These are indeed "still waters," beside which the good Shepherd leads his spiritual flock. In the margin of our Bibles these are also denominated "waters of quietness." The words in the original language of inspiration may correctly be translated "waters of rest !" Beautiful and expressive is this term. It admirably depicts the peaceful, blessed, heavenly, state of the believer, whose spirit is refreshed by the Divine Spirit—he is as a sheep which is led beside waters of rest ! The good Shepherd can alone conduct his flock beside these "still" and "quiet" and "rest"-giving waters. He himself "*leads*" them, that they may know where to find that pure supply, which is so necessary to satisfy their spiritual desires. He leads them "*beside*" the still

waters, that they may never thirst for any lengthened period, but be ever near to enjoy a timely and continual refreshment. And never does he bring them into circumstances where it is impossible for them to obtain the enlivening and satisfying influences of the Holy Spirit of promise !

The waters beside which the heavenly Shepherd leads his flock are pure and healing ; they are gentle, and ever flowing. No acrid, or unwholesome vapours, poison their source. No turbid waters commingle to pollute them. Soft and limpid is their flow, pleasant and silvery is their gliding voice. At times they resemble the tiny rill, or the silent brook in its unnoticed course. Again they appear in the depth and power of a larger stream. And yet again they flow like a mighty river with its full, and strong, and noiseless current. Like all other rivers, this spiritual river has a fountain-head. The Spirit "proceedeth" from the Father and the Son. The holy evangelist beheld it in vision as "a pure river of water of life, clear as chrystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," Rev. xxii. 1. The blessed Saviour asserted this truth, when he gave his sorrowing disciples the gracious promise of a "Comforter, whom," said he, "I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father," John xv. 26. The good Shepherd would not leave his sheep to parch with thirst. His heart was full of the most tender care to supply all their wants. Therefore, while yet living amongst them, he uttered that faithful promise. Yea, we read that on another memorable occasion, "in the great day of the feast," Jesus stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath

said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) John vii. 37.

The presence and the operations of the Spirit of God in the human heart, are justly exhibited under this appropriate emblem of satisfying waters. Still waters are deep and constant in their flow. The murmuring brook, the impetuous torrent, are generally shallow and uncertain in their course. But the waters of quietness glide slowly and gently onward, as if unwilling to pass away, till their fertilizing blessings have been richly imparted on every side. The Spirit of God is represented, indeed, in other parts of Scripture, as a fire, alarming, searching, and consuming in its progress. Such are the operations of the Spirit in his first great work, convincing the soul, by the Law, of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. But when He is spoken of under the emblem of water, his operations by the Gospel are cleansing, softening, quenching, fertilizing, and refreshing. The individual who had trembled under the Mount of Sinai,—who had “exceedingly feared and quaked,” is led beside the “waters of Shiloah that go softly,” Isa. viii. 6, that his faintness may be removed, and his strength restored. Here the sinner tastes for the first time the grateful draught, and feels that his long spiritual thirst is indeed allayed. He had thirsted for pardon, and he now finds that he is cleansed from guilt. He had thirsted for holiness, and he now feels that the burnings of sin within his evil heart are quenched. He had thirsted for tenderness and meekness of spirit, and he is now conscious that his passionate feelings are softened and refined.

He had thirsted for support and encouragement amid troubles and conflicts, and now he has obtained peace and refreshment. He had thirsted for fruitfulness in every good word and work, and now he experiences the fertilizing and enriching Spirit working within him various graces of the Christian life, so that he is enabled both to will and to do of God's good pleasure.

The Psalmist, we observe, speaks in the plural number, "He leadeth me beside the still waters." Waters of various kinds abound throughout the earth. They are to be met with in every clime and country. They are absolutely indispensable to the comfort and the beauty, the health and the existence, of every living thing. They are necessary for constant and varied use to the whole race of men, to rich and poor alike. These everywhere present, and everywhere needed, waters, form all one element, and fitly represent the everywhere present powers, and everywhere needed blessings, of the One Eternal Spirit. Every believing soul depends entirely for life and comfort on the supply of the Spirit of grace. It can "abound in hope" only "through the power of the Holy Ghost," Rom. xv. 13. He is the author and giver of life and light, of peace and pardon, of counsel and might, of consolation and supplications, of truth and holiness, of love and of adoption, of grace and of glory!

The Holy Comforter is a seven-fold, that is, an all-perfect Spirit. If the "churches" be "seven," He is the same full, life-giving, consoling, and sustaining Spirit to each of them, as if they were "seven Spirits," Rev. i. 4, and each presiding over his own church. Should these seven churches be multiplied by thousands, and their members by millions, yet would the one Divine Spirit be as capable to bless, and to sancti-

fy, them all, as if the powers and the perfections of so many millions of spirits were concentrated in his person, and exhibited in his agency !

The gifts and graces, the operations and influences of the Spirit of God are as "waters" manifold and free. They meet the believer in every place. They supply him in every need. They comfort him at every period. They strengthen him for every duty. They are suited to him in every condition. The Holy Spirit is not only near to the believer, he is with him ; he is within him. He has dwelt in the hearts of all the faithful in all past ages. He is dwelling now in the heart of every sincere Christian on the face of the globe. "He dwelleth with you," said the Saviour, "and shall be in you," John xiv. 17.

Then, indeed, have "the churches rest"—then, indeed, have the believers "rest"—when they are found "walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost," Acts ix. 31. The good Shepherd is graciously leading them beside the quiet waters. They each enjoy a secret, still, and holy, intercourse with God. The inward teachings and drawings of his Spirit exercise a sweet control over their hearts. Every wayward temper and unholy thought is subdued. The unruly will is unruly no longer, but moves in harmony with the will of God. Conflicting passions cease. "Peace" has been spoken over the troubled conscience, and there is a "great calm." Every pure desire is satisfied. The drooping faith is revived. The fainting heart is cheered. The soul tastes of the fountain of heavenly joy, and feels itself supremely blest in God as its everlasting rest.

The Divine Spirit manifests his presence in the human soul by his own quiet and peculiar influence.

It is inward. It is deep. It is purifying. It is progressive. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," Rom. xiv. 17. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," Luke xvii. 20. But though thus quiet and unnoticed of others, it is neither unknown nor unfelt by the recipient. How often has the believer in seasons of trial and sorrow been conscious of being led beside the waters of rest! What a change has been inwardly experienced! What relief to the oppressed heart! What soothing to the wounded feelings! What submission under the trials of providence! What cheerfulness in taking up the cross! What subduing of our pride! What restraining of our ambition! What softening of our wrath! What meekness, what gentleness, what love, what joy, are shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost!

Are we under bereavement? Does the heart throb, and the tear flow, because the friend whom we loved as our own soul, is numbered with the dead? The good Shepherd will gently lead us beside the waters of rest, and give us freely to drink of everlasting consolations. His Spirit, the Comforter, will be near us in the solitude of our chambers. He will incline us to open and peruse the sacred page. He will constrain us to fall upon our bended knees in earnest prayer before our heavenly Father;—and he will soothe our sorrow, assuage our grief, and bear away our heaviness. Has a deep and dark despondency settled upon our minds? The Spirit will graciously relieve our melancholy meditations. He will gradually elevate every thought and feeling, till the gloom of the grave shall be dispelled by cheerful anticipations of heaven! Does the Christian labour under some strong tempta-

tion? Are his convictions of conscience about to give way before his enticements to evil? The good Shepherd will lead him beside the refreshing waters, and give him spiritual strength. In the sanctuary of God, it may be, some petition in a prayer, some warning in a text, some sentence in a sermon, will be applied to his mind with heavenly power. He will be enabled to cast aside the temptation; and to go forward "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Is the faithful disciple in the fire of persecution? Is he threatened with dangers or death? The good Shepherd will lead him beside the still waters. The streams of heavenly consolation will so refresh his soul, that he will be enabled, like St. Stephen of old, calmly to commit his spirit to the care of his Almighty Shepherd,—and even meekly to intercede with him to have mercy upon his murderers!

At all seasons, and in all circumstances, the Shepherd conducts his flock "beside" the still waters of the Spirit of grace. Nothing but their own sin and unbelief can deprive them of his consoling refreshments. The Shepherd is ever watchful, lest his sheep turn to forbidden cisterns, and seek relief where it never can be found. He leads them by the hand of their outward circumstances, and by the inward teachings of His Spirit, to quench their spiritual thirst at the streams of Divine truth. Oh what reviving waters are enjoyed by the fainting soul, when the Spirit gives it to drink of the everlasting promises! Dry and empty channels they may have seemed before, but now they are as "brooks by the way" to a thirsty traveller, full and flowing with refreshment! What vigour do they not impart, by the Spirit, to our holiest resolutions! What strengthening of the understand-

ing! What purifying of the affections! What reviving of the faith! And what renewing of the hopes! "Exceeding great" indeed, and "precious" are the "promises" of God! They are soul-refreshing streams, alike unexhausted and inexhaustible!

Oh what still and refreshing waters does the believer enjoy in communion with his God! How blessed are the hours of secret prayer! We feel that we are alone with God as a child with a father! We believe that we are accepted before him in the righteousness of our Elder Brother. We realize that he is pleading on our behalf before his Father and our Father, before his God and our God. We are conscious that the Spirit also is making intercession within us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And we are thus comforted by the thought, that our unworthy prayers ascend before the throne, with those of the Great High Priest, and of the Interceding Spirit! What an amazing privilege! What a transcendent honour! The praying soul is brought into immediate union with the Triune Jehovah! The King of heaven graciously admits the believer to his presence! He condescends to listen to his petitions and adorations, his supplications and confessions, his praises and his thanksgivings. The Spirit of God as living water, is poured forth from the Eternal Fountain. The praying soul partakes thereof, and is strengthened. His languishing graces are revived. He is led beside the still waters of secret prayer, and is abundantly refreshed. The love of God is shed abroad in the heart of the believer by the Holy Ghost. A blessed peace pervades his breast. He feels that he need thirst no more: for the water which Christ has given, is within

him as "a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life," John iv. 14.

Dost thou feel within thee, O reader, a deep, constant, spiritual thirst? Every member of our fallen family is thirsting after rest and peace and happiness! Dost thou thirst after God, in whom alone these are to be found? Is the good Shepherd leading thee beside the "still waters?" Canst thou say with the Psalmist, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God," *Psa. xlii. 1.* "O God, thou art my God. Early will I seek thee. My soul thirsteth for thee. My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is!" *Psa. lxxiii. 1.* If these be the longings of thy soul, follow the leadings of thy Shepherd, and they shall be abundantly satisfied!

Suffer thyself, then, O Christian, to be led. Presume not, at any time, either to linger, or to precede. Follow! Go after thy Shepherd! Follow him patiently, gladly, and constantly. Keep close to his footsteps. Wheresoever he leads thee, he will open waters of life and peace. Go, unhesitating, through this dry and thirsty land of sorrows, trials, and disappointments. With thy Shepherd before thee, thou shalt be assuredly supplied. "Bread shall be given thee, thy waters shall be sure." "In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert," *Isa. xxxv. 6.* Suffer thyself, then, O Christian, to be led. High as may be the mountain, and deep as may be the valley, still follow thy Shepherd. He knows thy need. He will not forget thy thirst. "When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear

them, I the God of Jacob will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water," Isa. xli. 17, 18. Suffer thyself, then, to be led beside these waters of rest. They are free to all. The most unworthy are invited to drink. The most despondent are encouraged to partake. Let no hurry of business delay—no burdens of care prevent thee. Let not the sorrows of thy heart prove too overwhelming to deter—no joys of this life too captivating to detain thee, from thy God! With him is the fountain of life, and he will make thee to drink of the river of his pleasures, Psa. xxxvi. 8.

God himself is the fountain, and God in our nature is the fountain opened, Zech. xiii. 1. The waters of holiness which that fountain sends forth, and these alone, purify and refresh the immortal spirit of man. They impart unending life, undecaying health, and everlasting happiness. Oh, that as we journey onward we may be more and more enabled to testify that we "have been all made to drink into one Spirit," 1 Cor. xii. 13. The good Shepherd freely invites every member of his flock to partake of these "still waters." Under the Old Testament dispensation his voice was heard saying, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," Isa. lv. 1; and at the close of the New Testament, his last, is likewise his largest, invitation: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," Rev. xxii. 17. To these waters of rest, the good Shepherd continually calls his flock. Beside these streams of holiness and

peace, he has from the beginning tenderly led its various members, who have preceded us in the journey of life. Beside these waters of health and quietness, he is graciously leading his feeble sheep, who now tread the wilderness of this world. Beside these rivers of life and salvation, he will faithfully lead all the members of his flock, who may ever hereafter be found upon the earth. And when these successive companies of the past, the present, and the future, shall have been safely conducted through the deserts and dangers of time, and gathered together into one, within the heavenly fold, the good Shepherd will still for ever love, and still for ever supply, his redeemed and joyous flock; for "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters," Rev. vii. 17. Oh that every reader may be enabled *then* and *now* to testify, "He leadeth ME beside the still waters!"

RESTORING THE WANDERED.

VERSE 3.—*He restoreth my soul.*

THE wisdom, the power, and the goodness of God, are not more strikingly exhibited by the character and the office of a shepherd, than are the dispositions and the characters of men, by the habits and propensities of the inmates of a fold. A sheep presents in many respects an appropriate emblem of a sinner. It is weak. It is defenceless. One while it is easily led, and at another it must be forcibly driven. Ever and anon it manifests two opposite propensities: the one of wandering from the fold, and the other of following the herd, of going with the multitude. And those by whom it is most familiarly known, have not failed to remark, that under its semblance of innocence, there often lies concealed much perversity and self-will.

Of these several characteristics of the dumb animal, the Psalmist selected one, remarkably significant of his own weakness and waywardness as a sinner, and of the grace and goodness of his Lord as a shepherd. The sheep often wander from the fold, and David felt that his heart often wandered from God. He knew that there lurked within him, by nature, a constant proneness to err; and that of himself he could neither resist temptation, nor retrace his steps when he

had yielded. With gladness and gratitude, therefore, does he thus bear testimony to the kindness and the love, the power and the watchfulness, of his heavenly Shepherd, "He restoreth my soul."

These words convey two-fold instruction. They inform us not only that God is a Restorer, but teach us also by implication, that David was a wanderer. This painful truth the Psalmist on no occasion wishes to conceal. He never attempts to deny or to palliate those defections with which he was chargeable before God. With an ingenuous mind he continually confesses them. Listen to the humbling acknowledgment and earnest supplication with which he terminates his long psalm of deep and delightful experience—"I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments," *Psa. cxix. 176.*

How forlorn and melancholy is the condition of a sheep that has wandered from the fold! Its former companions are safe and happy, while it is lonely and miserable. With wearied foot the sheep traverses the mountains, and fills the valleys with its pitiful bleatings. At every step it takes, distance from the fold increases, and dangers thicken around. Unhappy wanderer! whichever way it turns new troubles arise! The eye recognizes now no familiar object. The ear catches no friendly sound. It gazes around with terror, and would fain return to the fold. Many an exertion to get back is made. Hither and thither it vainly turns, but discovers no certain track. Again and again does the lonely wanderer put forth its utmost efforts. It breaks through the briar. It bounds over the plain, but is as far from home as before. Suddenly it stands to gaze. For an instant it anx-

iously listens, and then hastens away in an opposite direction. Wearied and panting in this restless course, it sinks at last upon the heath. There, alas, it must perish, for its strength is exhausted. The darkness of night is rapidly closing, and the ravenous cry of the wild beast is heard in the forest. And is the poor fallen wanderer left as a prey to the destroyer? Oh no! a friendly arm is at hand. The shepherd had missed his wandered sheep: he had hastened to search for it: and now, in the last extremity of the hapless creature, he finds it, lays it upon his shoulder, and brings it back to the fold with joy!

The wandering and restoring of a sheep, is a striking picture of the wandering and restoring of the soul! What a melancholy subject for contemplation is a backsliding believer! The deceitfulness of his own heart, has led him aside from the right way! He has become wearied of the fold, and has lost his relish for its pasture. The pleasures of the world, the lusts of the flesh, and "the pride of life," prove more enticing to his taste. No longer marking the footsteps of the Shepherd, his wistful eye fixes upon forbidden pastures. Many a tempting flower seems to grow luxuriantly there. And though he hears a voice of remonstrance within, he refuses to regard it. Stealthily he leaves the fold: or boldly he breaks away from it. The coveted pasture tastes sweet at first. His roving feet are tempted forward, and for a brief hour of sunshine, he fancies that he is happy. But the shades of evening close; the cloudy night of trouble gathers, and enemies and dangers surround him. He begins to feel that he is not within the fold. He wonders at the change he inwardly experiences. His peace of mind is gone, and he is at enmity with him-

self. Dissatisfaction has taken possession of his breast: he knows not what to do for rest. He hurries from one object to another: and seeks the pleasures of the world with a feverish thirst. He knows that he ought to return to the fold, but has now lost sight of the way. Neither heart nor resolution remain to make him search for it with diligence. He has given up the daily exercises of secret prayer. The Holy Bible has become to him a volume in which he has no pleasure. Those pious friends, with whose society he was wont to be delighted, he now either despises or avoids. The holy sabbath has become a day of weariness or of frivolity. And seldom or never does his foot turn towards the house of God. No holy love and gratitude to the Saviour reign within his bosom. No hatred of sin is felt. No abhorrence of unholiness is manifested. His moral sense is well nigh obliterated. Alas! his heart has become hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin: and his feet are caught in the snare of Satan. He has fallen! he has fallen! And shall he ever rise again? Yes, blessed be God, there is a Restorer. The good Shepherd loves his sheep, and suffers none that are his to perish. With anxious solicitude he follows them in all their wanderings. With eager delight he seizes them in the moment of their extremity. He extricates them from difficulty. He delivers them from danger. He brings them back into his fold. And, without upbraiding their folly, or their ingratitude, He assures them of his mercy, and enables the poor wanderer to say, "He restoreth my soul."

The yearning love of God over his backsliding people is altogether indescribable! He longs for their return. He waits that he may be gracious. He cannot bear to

cast them off. Even when he complains most deeply of their ingratitude, and threatens them with punishment, his heart overflows with relentings. "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you ; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever," Jer. iii. 12. "My people are bent to backsliding from me. Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him ! How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? How shall I deliver thee, Israel ? How shall I make thee as Admah ? How shall I set thee as Zeboim ? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together : I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim : for I am God, and not man," Hosea xi. 7.

How cheering and instructive is it to learn by the Gospel record that the good Shepherd took peculiar delight in discharging this part of his pastoral office ! "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost !" "What man of you," he inquires, "having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it ? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance," Luke xv. 4—7.

It is an interesting and important inquiry, In what manner does the good Shepherd commence and carry on the work of restoration ? We shall answer this, by

considering first the Lord's outward providential dealings with the backslider; and, secondly, the inward spiritual work by which he regains possession of his thoughts and of his affections.

First, then, in regard to the Lord's providential dealings with the backslider, we remark, that he "waits to be gracious." The checks of conscience ought to be enough to arrest the backslider at his first departure from the fold; but these he disregards. Instead of exhibiting repentance, he throws off restraint. The path of sin feels easy and pleasant to his foot. He experiences for the present no inward horror, and meets for a time with no outward trouble. All things seem so smooth and inviting, that his heart is lifted up within him. Like the youthful sailor in his first voyage, he beholds a pleasant sky, and enjoys a favourable breeze, and the idea of a storm or of a shipwreck is far distant from his mind. Oh, how seductive is the broad road of sin! The backslider thinks only of his pleasant path. He considers not that the goodness and forbearance of God are intended to "lead him to repentance," Rom. ii. 4. The paternal heart is yearning over him, and the paternal hand is reluctant to smite. God is dealing with him in mercy. When that fails, correction is not only administered, but increased in proportion as hardness of heart and the commission of sin advance. "The backslider in heart shall receive correction." The easiness of his downward course had tempted him to a swifter pace, and suddenly he arrives where two opposite courses meet. He finds himself unexpectedly placed in circumstances of perplexity. This is the second mode of the Lord's dealings with the backslider. He causes the wandered sheep to be caught, as it were, in a thicket. He arrests him for a

time, that he may consider his sin and folly, his danger and his duty. He causes his course to be thwarted, and his plans to be defeated. The unhappy backslider is embarrassed by successive disappointments. He feels as if everything went wrong with him, without any apparent cause. He is brought to his wit's end. A call of duty, it may be, summons him in one direction, while his darling sin urges him in another; he would, and he would not. Like an ox led to the slaughter, he hangs back for a moment, and then proceeds on his fatal course. Or again, he is called upon to act with vigour and resolution, and feels himself unsteady and wavering in his determinations. Instead of attributing all this to his sin, he regards it as the mere effect of outward circumstances. He was obstinately deaf to the remonstrances of his own faithful conscience, and he is now wilfully blind to the overturnings of a frowning providence. In very love, then, the correcting rod must be at last administered. This is the third point in the history of God's outward dealings with the backslider. Afflictions of various kinds, and of different degrees of severity, now meet him at successive stages of his progress. Troubles, sickness, poverty, or bereavements, assail him. The loss of character, of friends, of station, and of influence is employed to humble him. Then enemies rise up in unexpected quarters. Aversion and contempt are exhibited towards him. Life becomes a burden, and death itself is dreaded and coveted by turns!

Such are some of the most prominent modes of providential dealing, with which the Lord exercises his backsliding children. Every wanderer from the fold does not indeed undergo the same trials, or endure all these afflictions; but, in their measure, they

are experienced by every individual who forsakes the Lord. One case, indeed, there is, of which Scripture informs us, as an awful exception to this general rule. Better, infinitely better, to be overtaken by the utmost accumulation of afflictions, than to be the subject of that solitary exception! When the voice of conscience has been stifled, the entreaties of friends silenced, and the backslider has abandoned himself to his iniquity, he sometimes, indeed, neither suffers affliction, nor experiences remorse. The evening of his life may be closing in an untroubled calm; but it is only the presage of that coming storm of the Divine wrath which shall rouse him to everlasting despair! God in heaven may have said regarding him, as he did of Ephraim of old, "He is joined to his idols. Let him alone!" Hosea iv. 17. That there are such miserable transgressors, men who are "to every good work reprobate," Tit. i. 16, and whose consciences are "seared as with an hot iron," 1. Tim. iv. 2, the Scriptures plainly testify. St. Jude, ver. 12, emphatically describes them as men who feed themselves without fear,—as clouds without water,—as trees without fruit, twice dead, and plucked up by the roots! Fearful indeed is their condition! How awful the doom that awaits them!

With the single exception of this fatal class, both Scripture and experience teach us that the Lord fails not to administer the rod of correction to all his backsliding children. He does not "let *them* alone." Trials of various kinds, sooner or later, overtake them. Yet affliction never softens. Of itself it can produce no favourable change. Instead of awakening compunction, it excites resistance, fretfulness, and hardness of heart. To these outward providential dealings, there-

fore, it is absolutely necessary, in order to restoration, that there be superadded a powerful work on the heart of the backslider by the Spirit of grace. This opens the second inquiry which we proposed for consideration.

What is that inward spiritual process by which the Lord regains possession of the thoughts and the affections of the backslider? The inward, we remark, not unfrequently accompanies the outward work. The Spirit uses the instrumentalities of providence. His spiritual work of restoration commences in the conscience of the backslider. Its long-silenced note is now awakened. A still small voice falls upon his inward ear. He hears its whispers in the crowded street, in the busy mart, and in the frivolous throng. By day, by night, it proves a ceaseless monitor. Sleeping or waking, he cannot silence it for any length of time. Conscience sounds a perpetual alarm within him, and he can find no rest.

The Spirit of God, having thus awakened the conscience of the backslider, proceeds to make his darling sin distasteful to him. The coveted object for which he forsook his God, begins to lose its charm in his eyes. Its excessive enjoyment palls upon his taste. Not only does conscience cause him to regard himself with abhorrence, but the Spirit of God now causes him also to abhor his idol. He feels that it has obtained a mastery over him. He hates its galling chain. As was the nature of his sin, so is now its sting. Every sin has its own peculiar bitterness. The poor backslider is now convinced that the pleasures he pursued are pains,—that the friends with whom he associated are enemies,—that the wealth which enamoured him is deceitful,—that the beauty which enticed him is a

fading flower,—and that his so called happiness is nothing better than a delusive dream.

When sin has thus become a burden to the backslider, he is made deeply conscious of his alienation from God. He perceives that all this misery has befallen him, because he had departed from his God. An irresistible conviction constrains him to confess, "Had I not first forsaken God, he would not have forsaken me!" Bitter is the thought of having grieved the Holy Spirit, and crucified afresh the Saviour that redeemed him. The absence of the Lord from his soul, is now to him the very essence of misery. It feels to him as a foretaste of eternal torment.

When thus the root of the evil is laid bare, and when the backslider is brought to feel and to say with David, "Against thee, thee only (or principally) have I sinned," the work of restoration advances rapidly within his heart. He now earnestly sighs for deliverance. "Oh that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my tabernacle!" He longs for admission to the happy fold which he had forsaken. Like the prodigal son, in the parable, he would crave readmission to his father's house, though it were but to occupy a place amongst the lowest of his menials. The backslider, under the drawings of the Spirit, now gives himself to earnest and persevering prayer. He weeps and mourns. He acknowledges his sins. He implores mercy. He pleads for the forgiveness of his backsliding. He beseeches the Lord to be favourable to him again. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not

away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit," *Psa. li. 12.* To these secret exercises in his closet, the backslider adds a diligent use of all the other means of grace. He peruses the sacred volume with redoubled earnestness. He waits upon God in his sanctuary. He hallows the holy sabbath. He cultivates the society of those who fear the Lord; and is unceasingly anxious to have his spiritual life rekindled, his spiritual energies invigorated, and his spiritual joys restored.

The soul of the backslider is thus effectually roused by the quickening Spirit. His conscience becomes more and more tender. His hatred of sin deeper. His contrition and self-abhorrence unceasing. Thoughts revive that had lain dormant in his heart. He thinks of what he has done by his sins. He thinks on what he has lost by his backsliding. How much felicity he has forfeited! How many temptations he has invited! What grievous ingratitude he has exhibited! He mourns over his unfixed and wandering thoughts. He sighs. He groans. He breathes and pants after God. Oh, how intensely does he long to feel again the life and power of godliness in his soul! He becomes watchful, sober, circumspect. He denies self—takes up his cross—and resolves to spend and to be spent in his Master's service. By degrees he is enabled to appropriate some one or more of the gracious promises of mercy. His faith is fed anew upon the word of God, and gains strength and vigour. Love to God and man begins to warm and to animate his affections. Hope revives within his bosom, and sheds a pleasing light over all his thoughts and prospects. He flees to the blood of Christ for full remission of the

past. He trusts to the intercession of Christ for gracious acceptance at the present. And he leans upon the Spirit of Christ to uphold him effectually for the future. Sin has now lost its dominion over him. The world is stripped of its delusive charms. "The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," have become odious in his sight. He loves holiness. He delights in virtue. His highest happiness is to obtain communion with his God. "Whom have I in heaven," he exclaims, "but thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire in comparison of thee." The powerful stirrings of the Spirit of adoption within his heart enable him to cry "Abba, Father." He feels that he is now brought back into the fold of the good Shepherd; and gratefully exclaims, "He restoreth my soul!"

This declaration of the Psalmist comprehends, however, other cases besides that of the open backslider: it is applicable to all who experience restoration in any measure from the languor of spiritual decay. The Psalmist uses the present tense, "he restoreth,"—as if he were conscious of continual declensions, of daily tendencies to earth, and forgetfulness of heavenly things, and that his spiritual Shepherd unceasingly interposed to restore and preserve his soul. Alas! it is the natural tendency of our hearts to forget God. The Lord himself complains, "My people are bent to backsliding from me." How transient are our liveliest feelings! How weak our strongest resolutions! How mingled and unworthy our purest motives! How short and interrupted is our closest intercourse with God! Nothing touches the heart of the sincere Christian so painfully as his proneness to spiritual declension. It daily grieves him. It hourly convinces him

of the innate corruption, deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness of his own heart. The hostility, too, of Satan is felt to be a reality. His agency is proved to be active and unceasing, by the hindrances and difficulties that occur, the sudden suggestions of delay, and feelings of disinclination, that arise, when he proposes to give himself to prayer. The most unexpected and trifling incident will sometimes prevent the discharge of the duty altogether, or so mar its spirit and fervency, as to deprive him of the strength, the consolation, and the refreshment which he should otherwise obtain. The spirits of evil are constantly on the watch to discourage, to deceive, and to defile his soul. Or again, the lawful occupations of life engross too much of his attention; cares increase; the things of the world insidiously rise in his estimation, and the power of vital godliness is proportionably lessened. Outwardly the Christian appears the same as before. Neither in the family, nor in his public devotions, may the declension be observed; yet the tenderness of his conscience is injured. The secret duties of self-examination, and reading of the word, of meditation, and of prayer, are hastened over, or omitted. Alas! the warmth and fervour of his devotion are decaying. He is not so serious, so active, so zealous as he was before. Duties are performed only to quiet the upbraidings of his conscience. There is no heart towards them. Plausible excuses are framed or imagined for their neglect. The slightest hindrance is deemed a sufficient apology for absence from the means of grace. His heart is sunk into a lifeless, stupid state. Unbelief beclouds the soul. It is cold or lukewarm. It is dull and careless. It is backward and averse to be alone with God. The thoughts wan-

der to the ends of the earth! Oh, melancholy state! Oh, wretched condition! The servant of the Lord beguiled by Satan! The child of God estranged from its Father!—shunning his presence!—and become weary of his converse and fellowship!

Of how many, alas! may it be said, that though they have not fallen into open sin, yet that they are not as they once were in Christian devotedness! Like the church of Ephesus they may be known by their “works,” and their “labour,” and their “patience,” and that they “cannot bear them that are evil.” They may have “suffered much for Christ’s name’s sake,” and “not have fainted;” “nevertheless he may have somewhat against them, because they have left their first love,” Rev. ii. 1. Is this thy case, O Christian reader? “Remember from whence thou art fallen.” Repent and do the first works: lest thy candlestick be quickly removed out of its place! Examine thyself honestly. Probe thine own heart. Linger not in a state of spiritual slumber. Gain time, *make* time, for self-examination. Where is the delight with which the ordinances of God were wont to be enjoyed? Where is the love, the pure and glowing love, to God and man, which once burned within thee? Where are now thy tears over thoughtless sinners that weep not for themselves? Where is thy fervency in prayer, thy abhorrence of all sin, and thy faithfulness in re-proving it? Oh, reader, hast thou left thy first love? Are the consolations of God small with thee? Flee to thy closet. Fall upon thy knees. Weep before thy God. “Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God.” And he will graciously restore thy soul, and say unto

thee, "I will heal thy backsliding. I will love thee freely; for mine anger is turned away from thee."

But again, hast thou fallen from the Ephesian into the Laodicean state? Art thou, O Christian, become "lukewarm" in thy discipleship? Is thy religious profession neither "cold nor hot?" Thy Lord would rather that thou wert altogether cold, than lukewarm! "I would thou wert either cold or hot." Dost thou deceive thyself as though thou hadst a stock of grace, and stood in need of nothing from thy God? Sayest thou, "I am rich, and increased with goods?" Hast thou forgotten that by nature thou art "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" Oh, take "counsel." Take counsel from "the faithful and true Witness." He is knocking, by this entreaty, at the door of thy heart! Dost thou hear his voice? Oh, be listless and slothful no longer! Arise! Open the door! He will come into thy heart, and freely bestow the fellowship of his love upon thee! Overcome this lukewarmness. Be entreated to strive habitually against it. Wrestle for thy life. "Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die." "As many as God loves, he rebukes and chastens." "Be zealous, therefore, and repent." Arouse thee, O Christian. Cry to the Spirit of life to rouse up thy slumbering soul. Inactivity is a forerunner of death. Oh, "grieve not the Spirit." "Quench not the Spirit." "Resist not the Spirit." Persevere in earnest prayer till thy hard heart be melted, and the seal of forgiving love be again impressed upon it by the Spirit of the living God. The good Shepherd will give thee energy and vigour of determination. He will enable thee to overcome all sloth, and listlessness, and backsliding. And he will restore thy soul from the weak-

ness and wanderings of thy thoughts, from the dulness and deadness of thy affections, from the fears and the faintings of thy spirit, to health, and holiness, and peace—to a firm faith, a glowing love, an animating hope—to walk in the paths of righteousness—to taste the joys of his salvation—and to enjoy the fellowship of thy God !

PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

VERSE 3.—*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

IN eastern countries the shepherd "goes before" his flock. He "leadeth them out," John x. 3. The sheep know his voice, and they gladly follow wherever he conducts their steps. Experience teaches them that the paths he chooses, are invariably the best, both for their pasturage and for their security. Of all the members of the flock, we can suppose none to be more sensible of this fact;—none to be more willing to cleave close to the shepherd;—none more ready to follow implicitly wheresoever he is pleased to lead, than those whom he had just before reclaimed from wandering! They had fully proved thereby both their own folly and their shepherd's kindness; and now that they hear his voice "calling his own sheep by name," and "going before them," will they not be the most diligent to follow his footsteps, and the most determined to adhere to the path he has chosen, (however narrow, and rugged, and even dangerous, it may appear,) as the best, and the safest, yea, and the only right road which they can pursue? Such is the conclusion of every restored member of the flock of Christ! He is restored not only to peace, but to purity—not only to happiness, but to holiness—not only to

safety, but to obedience ! This, we perceive, was the experience of the Psalmist. He could not only affirm, as an instance of his Shepherd's kindness, "He restoreth my soul," but he could also add, as a proof of the reality of his own restoration, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

These comprehensive words direct our attention to three fundamental doctrines of the sacred Scriptures. In the first place, they point out to us, in the person of the Psalmist, *what* is the nature of that great blessing which the Lord confers upon his people, "He leadeth me." Secondly, they show us *where* he invariably leads them, "in the paths of righteousness." And lastly, they reveal to us the reason *why* the Lord thus leads his people in the paths of righteousness, "for his name's sake."

In the first place, then, we here observe that the mind of the Psalmist is intently fixed on the inestimable blessing of being led of God. This is the second time that he has unequivocally testified his obligation to the leadings of his Shepherd. His defections and restoration occur between the two-fold experience of having been led beside still waters, and of being led in paths of righteousness. The Shepherd must not only "call his sheep," he must also "lead them out." He must lead them at first from the world into his fold : and from their returnings to the world, he must lead them back into his fold again. Even to the river of his pleasures he must conduct them, as well as along the narrow paths of obedience. From first to last the believer is led of God. Not a single step can he take heavenward, but under the leading of the good Shepherd. How can the poor silly sheep discern the only right way, when there are

ten thousand paths diverging to the right hand and to the left? Even after the believer has wandered—after he has bitterly felt how grievous a thing it is to go astray from God—he cannot be trusted to act as his own guide. “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” Jer. x. 23. The severest lessons cannot render him trustworthy, or teach him to walk by himself. Oh, no! The Shepherd must be still his leader. He it is who must choose out his every path—direct his every step—order every event—form every plan—regulate every desire—and go before him every moment! To this truth David bears distinct and oft repeated testimony throughout this psalm. All the abundance he enjoyed,—all the protection he experienced, was derived entirely from his Shepherd. “I recline amid green pastures, but it is my Shepherd who maketh me to lie down! I partake of still waters, because it is my Shepherd who leads me continually beside them! I am brought back from my wanderings, for it is his mercy alone that restoreth my soul! And I am now walking in the paths of righteousness, only because my Shepherd condescends to lead me in them for his own name’s sake!”

Every circumstance in our earthly history, is appointed and designed, by our heavenly Shepherd, to lead us forward in the paths of righteousness. Our time and place of birth, our station in society, our amount of education, our relatives and friends, our business and profession, our duties and responsibilities, our successes and reverses, our joys and sorrows, our health or sickness, our strength or weakness, our wealth or poverty, are all among the providential means by which the good Shepherd leads his people.

He leads us, also, by his Spirit working in our hearts. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," Rom. viii. 14. Emotions are awakened and impressions are produced, it may be, while we are yet young. Conscience is enlightened, and taught to act the part of a faithful monitor. The word of God is opened to the understanding. Its warnings are applied, and its promises are appropriated, under the teaching of the good Spirit. In prayer, in praise, in social worship, He leads our thoughts, and draws forth our affections. When tempted to go astray, the Holy Spirit leads us forward in the right path. His voice whispers within us, "This is the way: walk ye in it." The Spirit of God not only thus directs and encourages, but also graciously persuades and determines, our hearts to follow the good Shepherd. He teaches us to say, "Draw me, and we will run after thee." "I will run the way of thy commandments when thou hast enlarged my heart!"

The spiritual Shepherd thus leads his flock by the outward dispensations of his providence, and by the inward monitions of his Spirit. And though neither the fact, nor the manner, of his leading, may be fully known to them at the time, yet sooner or later He enables them to recognise both who it is that so graciously leads them, and who it is that so sweetly constrains them to follow.

This expression of the Psalmist, "he leadeth me," evidently implies not only the precedence and guidance of the Shepherd, but likewise the obedient following of the sheep. All the flock of the good Shepherd are made willing to be led. We are drawn of the Father, through the love of the Lord Jesus,

and by the power of the Holy Ghost. Love constrains us. We yield with thankfulness to heavenly leadings, and cheerfully follow in the appointed paths. We feel, however, that we daily need to be kept in a broken and weaned frame of mind, that we may be always willing to be led of God. Our affections must be sanctified, and our wills subdued, by the Spirit of grace, before we can become obedient and faithful followers of the good Shepherd. The Holy Spirit must both direct and dispose us to *enter* into his paths. The Holy Spirit must continually enable us to *walk* therein. The Holy Spirit alone can strengthen us to *persevere* in them unto the end. Every true believer is thus made willing and anxious to follow the good Shepherd. He keeps his eye steadily fixed upon his Lord. His ear is ever attentive to hear his voice in the Scriptures of truth, and in the dispensations of providence. "Looking unto Jesus" is the Christian's motto. With this he begins, continues, and terminates his course. He follows his Shepherd, and he is always right! He follows his Shepherd, and he is always safe! He follows his Shepherd, and he is always supplied! Blessed are they that are thus made willing to be "followers of God." He that hath mercy upon them shall lead them in a good way, wherein they shall not stumble. None shall be weary nor halt among them. A pillar of fire shall be their light by night. A cloud of refreshing shade shall be their guide by day. They wander not in darkness as other men. They both know whither they go, and the way they know. They follow not their Shepherd blindfold. They understand *where* he invariably guides their steps, and are each enabled to declare, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness."

This is the second of those vitally important doctrines, which the Psalmist here places before us. If any seeker of the way to Zion inquire, Where does the good Shepherd lead his flock? here is the answer, "In the paths of righteousness!" He calls his flock to follow in those very paths where he himself has walked. His foot never trod the ways of sin. Search for its print-marks, and they will be found only "in the paths of righteousness!"

The religion revealed from heaven is pre-eminently a religion of "righteousness!" Whatever may be the inconsistencies of its professors, let it be tried on its own merits. Holiness to the Lord is emblazoned on every page. Righteousness toward God and man is the basis of all its enactments. "I lead in the way of righteousness; in the midst of the paths of judgment," Prov. viii. 20. "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation (or basis) of God's throne," Psa. xcvi. 2. In all the paths of righteousness the good Shepherd has left an example to his flock that they should follow his steps. Never does he command them to enter upon a path which he has not himself trodden. Of no other teacher that ever appeared on earth, can it be affirmed, that his precepts and his practice perfectly and invariably harmonized. Carefully examine the Gospel record, and it will be found, that every action of the Saviour's life was marked by the most pure and perfect righteousness. The path on which Christ walked, was the fulfilling of the law. Love to God and love to man prompted all his thoughts, his words, and works. Yet it is the very righteousness of this way of the Lord which causes it to appear straight and narrow to sinful men. Our broad way of sin must appear narrow and difficult to the holy

angels, and its entrance strait. To pure and perfect beings, the way of holiness is broad and free ;—as plain as it is pleasant. Their wills move in harmony with the will of God, and therefore they roam at pleasure over all his works and ways. But the will and the ways of man, are not in unison with those of the Most High. Truth and falsehood, sin and holiness, light and darkness, are not more opposite to each other, than are the ways of God to the ways of the sinner. The love of Christ cannot dwell together in the same heart with the love of sin. "Little children," says the apostle, "let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous," 1 John iii. 10. Unless we earnestly endeavour to bridle the tongue, to curb the temper, to subdue envious, uncharitable, and covetous thoughts, and to mortify every sinful desire and appetite, we but deceive ourselves with the name of "Christian." The Lord has unequivocally declared, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple," Luke xiv. 27. The very name of Saviour is bestowed upon our Lord, because "he saves his people from their sins," Matt. i. 21. The great blessing which he was sent upon earth to confer, was, to "turn away every one of us from our iniquities," Acts iii. 26. Oh best of blessings! Deliverance from sin! Emancipation from the thralldom of evil thoughts, idle words, and unprofitable actions! "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart, also, will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and

cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them," Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

The path of righteousness is dear to the Christian. Behold him walking therein! He follows closely in the footsteps of his Shepherd. He resolves, by grace, that he will never turn aside from them; but press forward with increasing alacrity. At times, indeed, he walks with weeping, and is led onward with supplications, Jer. xxxi. 9. He mourns over the slowness of his progress, and bitterly weeps, when he reflects how much farther he ought to have been advanced. His heart is grieved at its own weakness; its liability to stumble, and to go astray. His supplications, therefore, become the more constant and importunate. "Oh send out thy light and thy truth. Let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles." "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk: for I lift up my soul unto thee." "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God." "Thy Spirit is good. Lead me into the land of uprightness."

The true follower of the good Shepherd loves to walk in all the paths of righteousness. He does not confine himself to any single virtue, but longs and prays for universal holiness. His desire is, that every thought and imagination of his heart may be brought into subjection to Jesus Christ. Whatsoever things are true and honest, whatsoever things are just and pure, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, he thinks on these things, Phil. iv. 8. And besides this, giving all diligence, he adds to his faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to

temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness ; and to brotherly-kindness, charity. For he knows that if these things be in him, and abound, they make him that he shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of his Lord, 2 Pet. i. 5—8. Every true believer is most sincerely anxious to be enabled to adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things. He longs to love the Lord his God with his whole soul, and to love his neighbour as he loves himself. He rejoices, therefore, at every opportunity of serving God, and of doing good to men. His whole heart goes forth in deeds of charity, and in the exercises of benevolence. And while he is thus happily engaged, he suffers no self-complacent feelings to lodge within his bosom. He renounces every idea of his own righteousness, and humbly renders all the glory to the Lord. "Thou hast wrought all my works in me," Isa. xxvi. 12. He is persuaded that it is God which worketh in him "both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Phil. ii. 13. He knows that it is not of his own natural power or inclination that he follows, nor for his own goodness' sake, that he is led ; but gladly acknowledges, with David, that he is entirely indebted to the generous kindness of his Shepherd—"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

The third great Scripture truth included in the Psalmist's words, here opens to our view ; and well may we be permitted to inquire, If, then, the flock for whose welfare this great and gracious Shepherd neither spares his resources nor himself, be so weak and worthless, why does he not entirely abandon it, and gather to himself another more worthy of his love ? Why does he nourish and protect an unprofitable flock with

such liberality and diligence, nay, lay down for them his very life? The answer is supplied by a member of that flock. "It is not for my sake; I deserve it not. Justly might I have been left to perish; but he graciously loves me; he seeks and saves me of his own free mercy!"—"He leadeth me," saith the Psalmist, "in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake!"

It is, then, altogether of the undeserved mercy and grace of God that his people are at first chosen and called; and it is for his own glory,—to manifest his love, his mercy, and his power, that he afterwards leads them in the paths of righteousness. This principle is steadily kept in view in the sacred Scriptures, and perpetually inculcated upon the reluctant minds of men. "Say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you," Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 32.

"The name of the Lord," is a scriptural form of expression to denote the person, the nature, the character, and the covenant-relationship, of the Most High. The great Jehovah is not personally known to sinful men. Our knowledge of him is derived from the names he graciously assumes, and the various works of his creating hand, and of his redeeming love. To know his name is the first step towards further acquaintance with him. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." When David here says, "He leadeth me for his name's sake," he means, first, "for his own sake," because it pleases him; and secondly, "for his glory, or character's sake," that it may not be dishonoured. These two truths were remarkably and appropriately applied by the prophet Samuel to com-

fort the terrified and disconsolate Israelites: "The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people," 1 Sam. xii. 22. There is no reason in the world why God should love the sinner, and make him his own. To pity the fallen, and treat a dependent with kindness, is quite conceivable, even amongst men. But that the great God should actually love the rebellious and polluted sinner,—that he should think of him,—that he should regard him with affection, and cause the yearnings of his heart to flow towards him, is altogether beyond our conception! We can assign no reason for it. We can only utter our astonishment with Job, and exclaim, "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?" Job vii. 17. In no way could the holy apostle account for the love of God to man, than by attributing it to its own greatness! "God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us," Eph. ii. 4. When therefore the Psalmist says, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake," we are to understand him to signify, in the first place, that the Lord was pleased to do so of his own mercy and grace, and for the manifestation of his own love and power and glory! We understand him, in the second place, to affirm that, after he had gone astray, it was not on account of any value or excellency which he possessed, that fresh kindness had been exhibited towards him, but that the Lord had restored him to the fold, and was now leading him in the paths of righteousness for the glory of his own name! This doctrine is fully stated by the Lord himself. Though he complains that his people had dealt very treacherously with him,

yet he immediately, and most graciously, adds, "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger; and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. . . . For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted?" Isa. xlviii. 9.

There is, then, a twofold argument contained in this statement of the Psalmist. The Lord, for his own sake, and for his own glory's sake, loves and leads the soul. God thus supplies the sinner with two powerful pleas. They are applicable alike to comfort him amid the troubles of life, to encourage him under the burdened sense of his unworthiness, and to sustain him when interceding in prayer for himself or others. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Oh, what a refuge is the name of the Lord! What will he not accomplish for his own name's sake! When we look around us upon this chequered scene of good and evil, where vice destroys virtue, iniquity abounds, the righteous suffer, and the wicked flourish,—where the light of the gospel is undervalued, and heathen darkness envelopes the vast majority of men! When we look within, and consider not only our own insignificance in the scale of creation, but also the corruption of our nature, and the degradation of our character by sin! Oh, what a relief, what a consolation, is it to know that God will for his own sake put all things to rights,—that God will for his own glory's sake overrule every event for good,—that he will for his own name's sake, not only condescend to regard us, but will deliver us from the debasement of our fall, and lead us on to glory and to virtue! Without this appeal to God himself we should be utterly lost, and

altogether bereft of hope. Search the universe to save yourself from despair, and only in the heart of Him whom you have offended can an argument be found for your salvation! That argument is his own name! Oh, how fully should this satisfy the tempted believer, and soothe him in his most disturbed moments! He beholds disorder and transgression on every side,—he sees in himself nothing but sin,—feels nothing but unworthiness, and can only cry, “Lord, save me, or I perish.” “If thou dost not save me for thine own mercy’s sake, I know not any other plea to urge!” How consolatory, how sustaining, how cheering, to him in such a state, to be assured that this is the best, the strongest, the most prevailing, of all arguments which he can use! Hear how the saints of old availed themselves of it in their extremities: “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great,” Psa. xxv. 11. “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins for thy name’s sake,” Psa. lxxix. 9. Jeremiah well understood how to urge the same plea: “O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name’s sake. . . . We are called by thy name, leave us not. . . . Do not abhor us, for thy name’s sake: do not disgrace the throne of thy glory,” Jer. xiv. 21. Daniel, also, based his intercession for his church and nation upon the same strong argument: “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name,” Dan. ix. 19. While the servants of God thus plead before him, and ground their whole cause on this single argument, how delightful it is to read in the records of truth that this argument prevails!

"I, even I, saith the Lord, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," Isa. xliii. 25.

Great is the privilege of the flock of Christ. The good Shepherd has appropriated his name to their use: "If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it," John xiv. 14. The Christian knows that all his prayers are accepted only for his Master's sake. The Saviour faithfully assured his disciples, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you," John xvi. 23. The name of Jesus, the Son of God, prevails. The weakest creature, by that name, is strong; the most unworthy, by that name, is saved! David knew that all the gracious dealings of the Lord, his Shepherd, towards him, were on account of his own holy name. No idea of his own importance dictated his confidence in God! And weak and unworthy as he knew himself to be, he could yet say, "In thy name will we rejoice all the day," Psa. lxxxix. 16. "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord," Psa. xxxiv. 2. The free and spontaneous love of God,—his mercy emanating from his mercy,—cut off all boasting in his own righteousness. He desired continually to retain this humbling doctrine in his own remembrance, and here he records it for the benefit of others: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." As if he had said, "I possess no claim upon his care; I am altogether dependent and helpless as a creature, and utterly unworthy and hopeless as a sinner; yet the Lord, of his own accord, takes pity upon me: he brings me out of the weakness of nature, and the defilements of sin, and he leads me onward in the paths of righteousness for his own name's sake."

Is this thy experience, dear Christian reader? Art thou walking in the paths of righteousness? Who first led thee into them? Thy good Shepherd! Who restores thee, when straying from them? Thy good Shepherd! Who is now leading thee onward in these right paths? Thy good Shepherd! Give him, then, all the glory, and say, "He leadeth me!" Look ever to him with a most grateful heart. He is a gentle guide. He will assist thy steps, as he directs them onward. He is a patient leader. Yet when he waits for thee, keep him not long waiting. Despise not nor abuse his very tenderness. Let love quicken thy pace. And when his love is shed abroad in thy heart, be not self-elated. Be willing to be freely loved—undeservedly loved! Oh, strange feeling! Loved, when an enemy! Sought after, when not worthy! Loved by thy Lord, and yet not loved for thyself! Oh humbling thought! Thy name is outcast—thy nature is depraved—thy spirit is unholy: yet the Lord looked upon thee in his great compassion. For his own pity's sake he extended to thee the hand of his mercy. For his own glory's sake he raised thee, he restored thee. For his own name's sake he is now leading thee in the paths of righteousness. To him, then, be all the glory!

Thy Shepherd is ever before thee, Christian! Be diligent to follow as near to him as possible. Far advanced as thou mayest be on thy heavenward course, thou still needest his leading hand. The ripened believer is ever the most ready to acknowledge, that without Christ he can do nothing. The longer we have been led, the more teachable and obedient we become. Every day's experience should convince thee, O Reader, how unworthy of confidence thou art, how worthy thy Shepherd is! Oh, love his paths.

Love righteousness. Abhor iniquity. Cleave to the "way of holiness." There thou shalt run, and not be weary; there thou shalt walk, and not faint. Thy Shepherd will revive thy spirit, and renew thy strength, as thou followest in his paths. Fear not their ruggedness. Fear not their length. Fear them not when they are narrow. Fear them not when they are steep. Fear nothing, but to turn from them. Yes, fear to *stand still*! Onward! keep ever onward! Thou art not yet at thy journey's end! Go forward! Get more faith, more love, more meekness, more zeal, more godliness, more patience, more humility, more holiness, more peace, more joy, more likeness to thy Lord, more meetness for thine inheritance above! Say, hast thou already attained? Art thou already perfect in all these graces? Say, hast thou even one of them in sufficient measure? Fear, then, to stand still! Press ever forward to the mark for the prize of thy high calling. Thy Shepherd guides the way. And through all the experiences of thy earthly lot—the hill and dale, the lights and shadows, of this chequered scene, thy Shepherd will be near, to cheer thy onward step, to nerve thy trembling heart. For his own name's sake, thy Shepherd will not cease to lead, he will not fail to guide thee. Go on then, O Christian, diligently following the leadings of thy Shepherd. He will make thy way plain before thy face. The longer thou walkest in his path, the more wilt thou have reason to delight in it. He will enable thee to perceive that his paths of righteousness are paths of truth: that the path of truth is thy path of duty: that the path of duty is the only path of safety: and that the path of safety is, indeed, a path of pleasantness and peace!

Righteous and true are the ways of the Lord! Peaceful and pleasant are all his paths! They are plain and straight to the weary foot. The Lord hath prepared an "highway." It is called "the way of holiness." "Wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein," Isa. xxxv. 8. "Stand ye in the ways, and see; and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls," Jer. vi. 16. Love to God, and love to man is the "royal" road, James ii. 8. All the paths of the commandments centre therein. What more "righteous" than "love?" "It worketh no ill to God or man: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law," Rom. xiii. 10. What more joyful than "love?" It is the gladness of angels—the perfection of heaven—and the bliss of eternity! Love is universal righteousness! Love is everlasting joy!

Righteous and true are the ways of the Lord! Peaceful and pleasant are all his paths! "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies," Psa. xxv. 10. The wandered sheep need "mercy" to restore them; the restored wanderers need "truth" to preserve them. Mercy without truth would be an *ignis fatuus* to deceive. Truth without mercy would be a burning fire to destroy. In the paths of the Lord "mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other," Psa. lxxxv. 10. Mercy pities, pardons, and relieves: truth arrests, elevates, and sustains, the soul! By mercy we are drawn to the Lord at first, and by his truth we cling to him for ever!

Righteous and true are the ways of the Lord! Peaceful and pleasant are all his paths! They are ways of light and paths of life to all the members of

his flock. "He brings the blind by a way that they know not: and leads them in paths that they have not known. He makes darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will the Lord do unto them, and not forsake them," Isa. xlii. 16. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," Prov. iv. 18. Along his brightening path the believer walks with God. The blessed Saviour is his way, his truth, his life;—a way without weariness,—a true way, without deception,—a living way, where there is no death. "In the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death," Prov. xii. 28. Behold the ever-living Shepherd with his never-dying flock! He leadeth them in "the way everlasting." "Righteousness goes before him, and sets them in the way of his steps." Because he lives, they shall live also. Where he precedes, they shall follow. He is the Lord their Shepherd, and the Lord their righteousness. He is their light, their life, their all. To him they ascribe the whole glory of their salvation. And as they journey on from earth to heaven, they each gladly testify that for every step they are indebted to the gracious leading and unmerited goodness of their Shepherd.—"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

PART I.

THE SHEEP FOLLOWING THE SHEPHERD THROUGH THE
VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

VERSE 4.—*Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.*

To enjoy the guardian care of their heavenly Shepherd at all seasons, is the peculiar privilege of the flock of Christ. In every emergency, therefore, it becomes them to place the fullest confidence in his prudence and his affection, in his resources and his power. During their previous history they have invariably found "that he led them forth by the right way." Why, then, should they not believe that to the very latest period of their earthly existence he will still be near to protect, and still be willing to provide? To distrust him for the present or the future, would be ingratitude for the past; it would belie their own experience, and greatly dishonour their kind and watchful Pastor.

Such appear to have been the sentiments of the Psalmist. His soul felt elevated by the review which he had just taken of the gracious dealings of Jehovah his Shepherd towards him. A deep sense of past and present mercies produced a blessed persuasion of his Shepherd's unvarying love and never-failing protection. His mind was inspired with a high and holy courage.

He felt convinced that in the path of righteousness, with his Shepherd before him, all must be well. He could therefore look forward to the future without anxiety or alarm. He could calmly contemplate every possible trouble and suffering, every enemy and danger, that awaited him ; and, relying on his Shepherd, he could say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for Thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me !"

The "valley of the shadow of death" is a remarkable form of expression. It is peculiar to the Holy Scriptures, and to Oriental literature. It is used to represent those horrible trials, those extreme difficulties and dangers, which darken the lot of humanity. Its import in this Psalm is not however to be limited to the troubles and sufferings of active life. The Psalmist neither excludes nor overlooks these ; but he rises above and beyond them all. He reaches a climax of asseveration—"Yea, though I walk"—which comprehends every conceivable trial, and especially the last and severest to which our nature is exposed. Death is the principal object in the Psalmist's view. He has now reached the last point in his beautiful similitude ; and the introduction of this comprehensive sentiment, imparts a finish and completeness to the whole picture which he has so graphically delineated. That Shepherd, whom he had delighted to represent as having graciously tended, and abundantly supplied, his people, he now rejoices to declare will assuredly "comfort" them in every coming trouble, and make them more than conquerors over their last enemy. He who was near them while they lived, will be with them when they die. He will not only direct, but accompany,

them through the valley of the shadow of death, and therefore they need "fear no evil."

David beautifully and poetically compares his mortal dissolution to a deep valley—a valley of dark and gloomy shadow, through which lies his road to light and rest, to life and joy. Death is indeed a valley! On a mount of healthful and happy existence we seem to spend our years; but soon our steps descend, our horizon becomes contracted, our range of vision is diminished: the shadows, too, are lengthened, the mists increase, and we are laid low indeed. How great the change! The animated being who seemed to tower above the mountains, and to array himself with the sunbeams of prosperity, lies low in the valley, and shrouded by the shadow of death. Where now is the pomp of majesty, the pride of philosophy, and the splendour of arms? Where is the form of loveliness, and the diadem of beauty? They are all gone down into the valley, and lie in undistinguished obscurity beneath its shadow. Oh, what a valley of humiliation! How low indeed does man descend from his fancied exaltation! His strength no more avails him! His noble or his ignoble birth affords him no exception from the general fate! One universal law commands the descent of all the sons of Adam into that valley. It is not the vale of years of which we now speak; it is the vale of death. Men deceive themselves too often, by confounding these two together. They picture to their minds their own gradual decay after threescore years and ten; and in imagination behold themselves with hoary hair, and feeble steps, and bending form, descending cheerfully and gracefully to their rest in the vale below! But the vale of years is only one of many approaches to the great valley of the shadow of death.

Consult the records of that valley, and they will testify that the infant of days, as well as the veteran of years ; the strong and the healthy, as well as the sickly and the feeble ; the blooming maiden, and the young man in his strength, all come to rest in that dark and lowly valley without any interval or any regularity of arrival.

Death is the great valley which separates time from eternity. Multitudes enter this "valley of decision," but none return again to inform us of its depth or its darkness, its difficulties or its dangers. To the eye of sense it appears a real valley, and full of dangers, as inevitable as they are appalling. To the eye of faith it wears but the semblance of a valley, with all the appearances, but none of the realities, of danger. David denominated it a "valley of shadow." In a country so diversified as Judea by hill and mountain, plain and valley, woods and waters, rocks and sands, the language of the inhabitants was enriched with a great variety of natural and instructive figures. The course of the sun everywhere produced continual changes of scenery by the incessant fluctuations of light and shade. And it is easy to conceive that amid the narrow defiles, where projecting rocks overhung the winding path, the darkness of evening would be hastened, and the gloom of night anticipated, at particular spots, by deep dark shadows. Imagine you behold a shepherd conducting his flock from one distant pasturage to another. He presses forward with haste over the plain, and traverses the mountain with anxiety, lest night should overtake them before they have reached their desired resting-place. Their path begins to wind towards a vale below, but darkness increases, and dangers multiply as they descend. On one side is the fearful precipice, and on the other is the

gloomy foliage of the forest. At the bottom of an abrupt descent in their road, an overhanging rock threatens destruction; and the dark shadow beneath it, looks rather like the den of the wolf or the lion, than the road that shall lead them to their rest. The sheep are affrighted. Some of them instinctively turn to retreat; others press closer to their shepherd; and in proportion to the confidence which each places in his protection, so is the measure of their deliverance from fear. With his rod and his staff the shepherd gathers his trembling flock around him, and by the accents of his well-known voice he inspires them all with courage. He advances onward. His flock follow after him. And as they severally pass under that frowning rock, they discover that their alarm had been excited only by the shadow, and not by the reality, of danger. Such did death appear in the estimation of the Psalmist. He knew that it could only be the shadow, and not the reality, of evil, which he should encounter, while following his Shepherd through "the valley of the shadow of death."

David does not simply say the valley of death, but "of the shadow" thereof. This peculiar and appropriate image is strictly and scripturally correct. The curse of death originally pronounced on man, included not only separation of the soul from the body, but also the separation of both from God. Death was thus an instantaneous and an everlasting curse. But the ever blessed Redeemer interposed between the guilty creatures and their offended God. He is declared to be "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," Rev. xiii. 8. His mediation saved their natural existence, and opened to them the way of spiritual and everlasting life. Yet, alas! in a real and awful sense,

the sentence had taken immediate effect. In the very day that he ate of the forbidden fruit, the soul of Adam died within him. Yea, in that very moment, and by that very deed, his spirit became separated from its God, and lost its union and communion with him. This was real death—the death of the soul! Never let us forget this truth. By habitually contrasting our present temporal death, with that which God originally pronounced, we shall learn to regard the former as light and little in comparison. Bodily death sets the believer free for immediate admission into the presence of his God. The Saviour has positively affirmed, “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die,” John xi. 26. Again, he has declared, “He that believeth . . . is passed from death unto life,” John v. 24. The penal curse of death, separating the sinner in soul and body, at once, and for ever, from his God, was cancelled through the Mediator. And thus, in a very striking and important sense, we can affirm with the Apostle, “Christ hath abolished death,” 2 Tim. i. 10. He has abolished, or “made of no effect,” that death of instant separation of soul from body, and of both from God, which was pronounced on man; and the natural death through which the believer passes, is but as its dark and gloomy shadow. It represents that death to his mind, as a shadow represents the outline of a substance. The distant cloud which covers plain and mountain may look black and terrible; but when we enter into it, or rather when it envelopes us, we feel it to be but a passing vapour. Mere mortal dissolution may be regarded by the believer as the night; as a dark shade; as a deep sleep; as a temporary swoon which has, indeed, the appearance, but not the reality of death; or as the shadow

of a cloud, in which there can be no thunders to alarm, and no lightnings to destroy. The Prophet compares it to a veil, which conceals the human countenance only for a temporary period, Isa. xxv. 7. This veil is cast over all nations, but it shall one day be removed. Temporal death, therefore, even to the unbeliever, is but the shadow of that eternal death—that everlasting separation of soul and body from God—which awaits him in the other state of being. When, therefore, he is called to walk through the valley of the shadow of that death, having no Shepherd near to guide and to console him, no marvel that his heart becomes oppressed with fear and overwhelmed with apprehension. Death is to him a terrible shadow of a still more terrible reality!

But, Oh! how different is the condition of the true believer when summoned to descend into that valley! He advances calmly towards it. He enters the dark shadow with a quiet mind, and looks through it to a land of light and peace! He turns not hither and thither in haste or perturbation of spirit. His attitude is one of composure and of steady resolution. He "*walks*." He follows in the footsteps of his Shepherd, and therefore he will neither hasten impatiently, nor advance reluctantly. His position is solemn and peculiar. It demands unusual circumspection. In the consciousness, therefore, of his own weakness, he redoubles prayer and supplication. A false step now, he knows, may prove his everlasting ruin. He therefore "*walks*," that every step may be well considered; and he uses the utmost vigilance, lest by any possibility he should fall. He "*walks*," too, that he may survey that valley as he enters into it,—contemplate the land beyond to which he is going,—and cast a fare-

well look over the region which he leaves. And lastly, he "walks," that as he considers the past, the present, and the future, he may be able more abundantly to praise that gracious Lord, by whom his steps have been directed in all his former course—by whom he is now upheld and comforted in his descent—and on whom he relies for the supply of all needful grace and consolation to his latest moment!

But the believer not only walks *into* that valley, he walks "*through*" it. It is his privilege to know that whatever may be the trials and difficulties of the valley of the shadow of death, he shall pass through them all in safety. His Almighty Shepherd is with him. And so beautiful and attractive does the land beyond appear, that the damp vapours and the appalling darkness around and before him, seem as nothing in comparison. Innumerable as may be the open or the secret enemies which may assault him on his progress, he feels convinced that none of them shall be able to detain him as a prisoner. The "king of terrors," indeed, may exact the wonted tribute, as he passes on through his dominions; and though he have nothing wherewith to pay, but the garment of mortality which he wears, yet now he can dispense with its use for a time, and will not refuse to leave it behind him as a pledge, till in due season he return again and see it gloriously redeemed! He therefore regards the valley not as a place of abode, but as a place of passage. As surely as he enters into it, so surely shall he pass through it. The valley of the shadow of death, is to him as the valley of waters to the children of Israel, when they passed through the sea as on dry land. Yea, rather, he is like one of those children of the faith, when they walked through

the swelling of Jordan, and entered safely and joyfully into the long-promised land of Canaan !

While the believer thus walks through the valley of the shadow of death, it is his privilege to enjoy a most blessed state of mind. "I will fear no evil," says the Psalmist. The valley may be deep, and it may be dark ; it may be reported to abound with unnumbered dangers and enemies ; yet, says the believer, as I walk—yea, though I walk through the midst of them all—"I will fear no evil." He does not say, "I will feel no evil," but, "I will fear no evil." He knows that trials await him, and that flesh and blood must feel them. He fosters not any false courage, by a vain concealment of the truth. He never deludes himself with the idea that there are no difficulties and no terrors in the valley. Oh, no ! He is fully aware that sorrows and pains, shrinkings and agonies, assaults and temptations, may befall him, but he exclaims, "While I feel them, I will not fear them. All things shall work together for my good, why then should I fear any 'evil' from whatever I may encounter? I will fear no evil in the valley of the shadow of death !"

Two things alone in the universe, the believer should regard as strictly and invariably EVIL. These are SIN, and SEPARATION FROM GOD. The former is the cause of the latter, yet they are so closely allied as to be almost identical. Sin against God is an act of separation ; and separation from God is a state of sin. There can be no separation where there has been no sin ; and sin cannot be committed without instantly depriving us of heavenly favour, and cutting us off from union and communion with the Lord. This, then, is evil—absolute, universal, and essential, evil !

Pains and sufferings of body, the loss of friends and property, of health and comfort, are denominated evils by the children of the world. These are trials, but they are not evils, and may indeed be blessings. David did not intend to assert that he should enjoy exemption from these common sufferings of humanity. Oh, no! It is spiritual evil—it is moral evil, which is here spoken of. The sentiment is similar to that which the Psalmist has elsewhere expressed, "He shall preserve thee from all evil, he shall preserve thy soul," *Psa. cxxi.* The preservation of the soul from all sin, is its preservation from all evil. And it is from the fear of evil in this sense, that confidence in his Shepherd gave David deliverance. As if he had said, "No assaults of spiritual darkness shall be permitted at that trying hour to shake my faith—No temptation of the last enemy shall be allowed to draw me into sin—No fleshly agony, nor mental anguish, shall provoke me to 'curse God and die!' 'As my day is, so my strength shall be.' 'I will, therefore, fear no evil in the valley of the shadow of death.'" In substance, though not in words, David had doubtless prayed as we would daily desire to pray, "Suffer me not at my last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee." The Hearer of prayer is often pleased to strengthen the believer with a conviction that this prayer shall be answered. The Spirit of grace and of consolation enables him to adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities,

nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Rom. viii. 39. This triumph of the Apostle, was the triumph of the Psalmist. It is the triumph also of all the family of the faithful, from the beginning to the end of time. Their song, however, would be turned into lamentation, if one little word had not been excluded from this enumeration by the Apostle. He does not demand, "Shall sin separate us from Christ?" He well knew that it would—that it must. But he also knew that nothing else in the universe could separate him from his Saviour's love. He felt therefore both willing to endure the utmost miseries of time, and able to defy every human and satanic enemy!

The minds of the children of God, are often enlightened by his Spirit on the confines of eternity. Those losses and privations, those sorrows and troubles, which they formerly denominated "evils," they now more correctly designate "trials." And when they look down into the valley, as it opens before them, and feel that their Shepherd is leading them through it on a path of righteousness, where neither sin, nor separation from God, can befall them, they are each fully persuaded that they have good reason to affirm with the Psalmist, "I will fear no evil in the valley of the shadow of death." Such was the persuasion of a now sainted minister of Christ.* "I want to talk to you about heaven," said this dying parent to a member of his family. "We may not be spared to each other long.

* The late Rev. Hugh Stowell, Rector of Ballaugh, Isle of Man, a devoted servant of the Lord, whose memory is embalmed in the heart of the writer, and still retains its fragrance after many years!

May we meet around the throne of glory, one family in heaven!" Overpowered at the thought, his beloved daughter exclaimed, "Surely you do not think there is any danger?" Calmly and beautifully he replied, "Danger, my darling! Oh, do not use that word! There can be no danger to the Christian, whatever may happen! All is right! All is well! God is love! All is well! Everlastingly well! Everlastingly well!" Such was the actual experience of a departed servant of the living God. Not a doubt, nor a fear, was permitted to cross his mind. He saw no danger in the dark valley. He felt no fear of evil when called to enter into it. Death appeared to him but as a dark shadow, through which it was necessary to pass, in order to reach the clear atmosphere and bright sunshine of the land beyond. His language therefore was, "There can be no danger to the Christian whatever may happen!" And continually was he heard saying, "Joy and happiness! Joy and happiness! I am just at home—just at home now!"

"To fear no evil," then, "in the valley of the shadow of death," is a blessed privilege open to every true believer! "For death shall be to him no death at all; but a very deliverance from death, from all pains, cares, and sorrows; miseries and wretchedness of this world: and the very entry into rest, and a beginning of everlasting joy: a tasting of heavenly pleasures, so great, that neither tongue is able to express, neither eye to see, nor ear to hear them, no, nor any earthly man's heart to conceive them. . . . And to comfort all Christian persons herein, Holy Scripture calleth this bodily death a sleep, wherein man's senses be, as it were, taken from him for a season, and yet, when he awaketh, he is more fresh than when he went to

bed! Thus is this bodily death a door or entering into life, and therefore not so much dreadful, if it be rightly considered, as it is comfortable; not a mischief, but a remedy for all mischief; no enemy, but a friend; not a cruel tyrant, but a gentle guide; leading us not to mortality, but to immortality! not to sorrow and pain, but to joy and pleasure, and that to endure for ever!"—*Homily Against the Fear of Death.*

The act of dying is not necessarily accompanied with suffering. Dissolution often takes place without any bodily pains. The gentle breathing of our dying friend, by slow degrees subsides. Our own, is almost suspended with anxiety. We watch. We hope. We tremble. One moment we think he surely will awake to life again. Another moment tells us that his spirit has awaked in the eternal world. Yet nothing occurred, it may be, to mark its departure from the body. No shudder. No groan. No sigh. Sweetly and peacefully he has fallen asleep in Jesus! Such however is not the dying experience of all the members of the flock. Others suffer much, and suffer long. Yet sickness and diseases, agonies and pains, are but the precursors of death, not death itself. Many of the living have endured more dreadful sufferings than multitudes of the dying. Pangs the most intense, have been often borne with heroic courage. Heathens have contemned the pains of death. Which then of all our natural feelings, most powerfully affects the heart of the dying? It is separation from beloved relatives and friends! How sweet has been their companionship. Their pleasant converse has cheered and enlivened all the paths of our pilgrimage. But now we must leave them for a long journey, never to return. They weep to part with us. We mourn to part from

them. Is such a sorrow sinful? Oh no! It is as natural and christian, as it is tender and subduing. If too much indulged, however, it will mar our peace, weaken our faith, and bedim our hope! The holy Apostle did not forbid the Christian to sorrow, but only "not as others,"—in the same manner, and to the same extent, as the heathen "who have no hope," 1 Thess. iv. 13. The ever-compassionate Redeemer did not restrain his own sympathizing tears. When he beheld two weeping sisters, and their mourning friends, "Jesus wept." If, then, our separation from earthly friends, be the most formidable and distressing of the accompaniments of death, how desirable, how necessary, that our departing spirit should know a higher and a better Friend, in that world which it is about to enter! How consolatory to think, that while earthly friends are weeping beside the lifeless body, purer and holier friends are rejoicing with the immortal spirit! How blessed, when contemplating our new and lonely journey, to turn to ONE who will accompany us through its whole extent, to guide, to guard, and to console us! Such is the privilege of all the members of the flock of Christ. The hope of the gospel is their antidote to grief. The friendships of earth are indeed precious. Nothing can—nothing ought to eclipse them, but the friendship of Heaven. There is ONE there who is nearer and dearer than friend or neighbour, brother or sister, father or mother, son or daughter, wife or husband; and the anguish of parting from them, can only be counterbalanced by the joy of meeting with Him! To know that this heavenly Friend is near at hand, inspires our hearts with courage. To "look up stedfastly into heaven," and with St. Stephen's faith to see our glorified Shepherd standing at the right

hand of God, as if waiting to accompany us through the dark valley, may well dispel every sorrow from the heart, transform the weeping countenance, and make it like an angel's face, beaming with heavenly joy ! Such was the blessed experience of the heart of the Psalmist when he exclaimed, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, FOR THOU ART WITH ME, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me !"

PART II.

THE SHEPHERD GUIDING AND COMFORTING HIS SHEEP THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

VERSE 4.—*For Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

IN the former part of this verse, the Psalmist presented himself to our view, as a member of the faithful flock, closely tracing the footsteps of the good Shepherd:—as resolutely following him along the rough and thorny road, and through the darkest and most dangerous defiles:—yea, and as walking through the valley of the shadow of death, with an undaunted mind, and saying, “I will fear no evil.” And now, in this latter part of the verse, he reveals the secret source of his courage, and discovers to us the grounds of his confidence, “For Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

When we are about to enter into another, and that an unknown, world, how blessed and supporting must it be, to have the King of that country at our side affording protection, imparting consolation, subduing fear, and inspiring hope! Such is the blessed privilege of the flock of the good Shepherd when called to enter the eternal world. They experience that theirs is a Royal Shepherd. He is Lord of the kingdom of grace, through which they have journeyed. He is Lord also of the kingdom of glory, upon which they are just

entering. And as the Lord their Shepherd, he is most graciously near them. He is the last to comfort them in time, and the first to welcome them in eternity. Yea, He condescends to accompany them as they walk ; and to be their guide and their guard across the unseen boundaries. The Royal Shepherd is ever with his sheep. He is not only near to them, he identifies himself with them. He makes their cause his own. He guides them as their Shepherd—he protects them as their King—and the king of terrors flees dismayed before him. So certain does the Psalmist feel of his Shepherd's presence, that he speaks of it in the present tense, as though he already experienced its comfort in the dark valley. He does not say, "I will fear no evil, for thou wilt be with me :—" but, "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." Oh, amazing thought ! The Shepherd with his dying sheep ! The Creator drawing near to his decaying creature ! The Prince of life present with his expiring people ! Who shall describe the blessedness of the presence of the Lord ! A seraph's tongue could not unfold it. The presence of God is the joy of angels—the bliss of heaven—the brightness of immortality ! It constitutes the sweetest, the purest, the most satisfying and transcendent, happiness which any created being can enjoy ! It is heaven upon earth !

The holiest and best of men, in all ages, have earnestly prayed for the enjoyment of God's presence. They regarded it as the strength of their heart—the shield of their protection—and the fountain of their joy. Its absence they deprecated as the most dreadful of all evils that could possibly befall them. "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." To go forward in our own strength—to trust in our own

wisdom and virtue, is a fatal security. Especially awful is such self-confidence when we are about to descend into the dark valley. Dangers threaten on every side. The way is dark and intricate. Enemies are on the watch. Snares and pitfalls abound. How then can the weak and silly sheep direct its path, escape these dangers, and subdue its foes? But if the heavenly Shepherd be with it, how can it miss the way? If the Mighty God be for us, "who," asks the Apostle, "who can be against us?" If the Lord Jehovah be at our right hand, with what victory shall we not triumph? He has himself passed through this valley. He knows every turn and winding of the road. He can detect every snare of our most crafty foe. His single arm is strong to defend us against the united opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He is worthy therefore of our fullest confidence. And Oh, how gracious is this heavenly Friend, this Divine Shepherd, thus to accompany every member of his flock through the valley of the shadow of death! How kind, how condescending, to conduct them himself through the dreary shade, and to lighten its terrific gloom by the brightness of his presence!

The presence of God has ever inspired his faithful people with a most noble courage. It has filled their hearts with "perfect peace," when exposed to appalling dangers, or to the most cruel sufferings and death. How calmly stood the servant of God, amid the howling tempest and impending shipwreck, when he bade the disconsolate mariners "be of good cheer!" What was the secret of his peace? The Lord was with him! Acts xxvii. 23. What sustained the same Apostle in the imperial city, when surrounded by heathen enemies, and forsaken by christian friends, and expecting

a violent death? Was it not that the Lord stood with him and strengthened him? 2 Tim. iv. 17. What made the prison at Philippi ring with the unwonted sounds of prayer and praise? Who taught two iron-bound prisoners, though lacerated with "many stripes," to sing for joy at midnight? Their Lord and Saviour, who was present with them! What enabled the noble army of martyrs to be faithful unto death? It was the presence of the everlasting God! His Spirit was within their hearts, and strengthened them to say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge," Psa. xli. 1—7. This is the grand secret of the confidence of believers. Their Lord is with them in the valley of the shadow of death. As truly as he was seen with the three children in the burning fiery furnace, so truly is he, in a spiritual manner, with all his faithful, but afflicted, and dying, people, sympathising, comforting, and delivering! Yes, O believer, thy God will be with thee! Whosoever thou shalt be called, and in whatsoever circumstances; whether dying in the desert, or sinking in the ocean; expiring on thy pillow, or falling at thy table; surrounded by thy friends, or pining away in solitude; racked by pains, or wasting with disease; tortured by men, or assaulted by Satan, thy Lord will be with thee, Jehovah thy Shepherd will be thy comforter, for "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints!"

Fear not, then, O Christian, when thou art about

to descend into the valley of the shadow of death. Thou shalt suffer no evil. Thou shalt not be detained a prisoner. Thou shalt walk through it as the conquered territory of thy Lord. Thy Shepherd will accompany thee. Oh then, fear not death. Fear sin ! Oh, fear not death. Fear separation from thy God ! Then death cannot separate thee ; sin cannot condemn thee ; and dissolution cannot destroy thee ! Walk with thy God through life, and thou shalt fear no evil in thy death. Anticipate thy last journey in every possible variety of aspect. Think of it as a valley for depth, or as the night for darkness. Let it be as through waters for their rage, or through a fiery furnace for its burning pain. Suppose thyself tossed in an affrighted bark, and about to sink into a watery grave—or bound in a prison, and about to walk through an ignominious death—or surrounded by thy most malignant enemies, and expiring under the hands of torturers : Fear not ! Thy Lord will preserve thee from all evil, he shall preserve thy soul ! If the billows open to receive thee, or the furnace and the faggot flame to consume thee, still fear no evil. Thy Lord will be near thee ! “ Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not ; for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name. Thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee : and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee ; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour,” Isa..xlili. 1—3. Rejoice, then, O Christian ! Be strong in thy God. It is not an angel who promises to attend thee. Neither do seraphim or cherubim

here volunteer to sustain thee. It is God himself, the Mighty God, who vouchsafes to be thy guide in difficulty, thy guard in danger, thy light in darkness, and thy life in death ! The ministering spirits attend thee, only because their God is with thee. They draw near, when he has come to thine aid. They receive and welcome thee, because he has accepted thy soul. The bidding of the Lord regulates all their offices of love. Without his sanction and command, they could do nothing for thee ;—they would not, if they could. Where Jehovah's presence is not graciously vouchsafed, the angels of light and love hover not around the departing spirit !

The good Shepherd, while here on earth, gave a faithful promise to be ever present with his flock. That promise extends to all periods. It comprehends all circumstances. Time fleets, and generations fade, but his word endures. "Lo ! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world !" This was his farewell promise ; and now that he is ascended into heaven he fails not to remember it. Fear not then, O believer, that thou shalt ever be forsaken. While one of his people remains upon the earth, so long will he continue to perform his word. Before his departure he promised to his mourning disciples that he would not leave them "comfortless," and ere long he poured upon them of his Holy Spirit. That Spirit, the gracious Comforter, he will also pour on thee ! At the hour of thy greatest need, thy greatest consolations shall be vouchsafed. Only cleave thou to thy Shepherd. Follow close in his leadings. "Be faithful unto death, and he will give thee a crown of life."

The good Shepherd is not only near to his flock in the dark valley ; he also uses every means to sustain,

to defend, and to encourage them. He will neither go before them at a distance, nor walk inattentively at their side. 'His "rod and his staff" shall be employed to "comfort" them. With the "rod" the shepherd gathers his sheep, counts their number, directs their movements, and rules over the flock. The rod is thus an emblem of his power, and of his ownership; and, figuratively, this rod is typical of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The "staff" with its crook, is employed for the relief of those sheep that are entangled in the thicket, that are fallen into a pit, or that are seized by any of the beasts of prey. With his staff the shepherd extricates his sheep from every difficulty, and grapples with, and beats down, every assailant. It is thus an emblem of the near and ready aid of the shepherd for the relief and comfort of his flock. The staff of the spiritual Shepherd is the Word of God.

These two instruments, the rod and the staff, the oriental shepherd never lays aside, and uses them separately, or conjointly, as occasion may require. Lev. xxvii. 32; Ezek. xx. 37; Micah vii. 14; Zech. xi. 7. The heavenly Shepherd uses the rod of his Spirit, and the staff of his Word to sustain and to deliver his flock. With these he leads and cheers them through life. With these he upholds and comforts them in the valley of the shadow of death! When Satan would assault the soul, and claim it as his own, the Shepherd extends over us the "rod of his strength." He numbers us amongst the members of his little flock, and will not suffer us to be plucked out of his hand. When faith waxes dim, and we scarcely discern the peaceful path through the valley, the rod of his Spirit directs us aright, and preserves our footsteps in the

straight and only road. "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." Again when anxious cares oppress the mind, and the thicket of perplexity impedes our progress, the Shepherd will extricate us with the "staff" of his Word! He will beat down every entanglement that fastens us to this present evil world; and he will set us free to go forward without hindrance through the valley of the shadow of death. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," John xvi. 33. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," John xiv. 27. Again if we fall into the slough of despondency, or almost into the pit of despair, the Shepherd will both reach and raise us with his rod, and assist and support us with his staff. He will send his Spirit with his Word into our hearts. We shall be strengthened to arise. We shall be directed to firm and stable footing. Our feeble steps shall be upheld. And we shall be enabled to say as we advance, "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

How truly, indeed, how invariably, do we hear the dying believer testify that all the comfort he enjoys is derived from the Spirit and the Word of God! At one moment, the good Spirit witnesses within him; at another, the holy Word instructs him; and continually the comforting power of both are evidenced by the sentiments of deep and rich experience which issue from his lips. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to his soul. He brings to his remembrance with peculiar power, propriety, and seasonableness, whatsoever Christ has spoken. The Spi-

rit of adoption witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God ; and sheds abroad Divine love in his heart. The Spirit enlightens his understanding to comprehend the amazing plan of salvation. Redemption is opened clearly before him. He is enabled to see that as a dying sinner, he has a more sure and glorious salvation by his Redeemer's righteousness, than he could have ever obtained from his own, however perfect. The "fear of death" may have formerly made him "subject to bondage," but now he is delivered from its thralldom, Heb. ii. 15. The Spirit has given him everlasting emancipation ; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." He feels that the Spirit of life has "made him free from the law of sin and death." He discerns by the Spirit that the offended law is not only appeased and satisfied, but also "magnified and made honourable" by the perfect obedience of a Divine person in human nature, to all its penalties and requirements. He knows that the sting of death is sin, and that the strength of sin is the law, but he also knows in what a godlike manner the Lord Jesus has achieved his victory over it. He perceives how by his righteous obedience to the law he deprived sin of its strength to condemn, and thus rendered the monster's sting powerless to destroy. He therefore, believes in him as the "Lord his righteousness," and enjoys a complete triumph by the Spirit over the fear of death, and over him that had the power of death, and consequently is enabled to say, "Thanks be to God which giveth me the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ !" 1 Cor. xv. 57.

The Word of God also is ever at hand, as a "staff," for support to the dying believer. It is ready for immediate and continual use. It was the Shepherd's own

staff while he lived on the earth. With it he walked through life, and beat off the assaults of every enemy, Matt. iv. 1—11. The good Shepherd never fails to use the same staff of his Word to comfort the members of his flock. When the dying saint has opened the sacred page, and is perusing its instructive words, He applies to his mind such passages as these—"There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it," 1 Cor. x. 13.—"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ; who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him," 1 Thess. v. 9, 10.—"For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death," Psa. xlviii. 14.—"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," Rom. xvi. 20.—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matt. xi. 28.—"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37.—"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour," Titus iii. 5, 6.—"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Luke xii. 32.

In the long continuance of disease, and in the extremity of weakness, when the feeble hands can no longer hold the volume of truth, and the filmy eye cannot trace its sacred page, then the good Shepherd employs some beloved relative or friend to administer

support and consolation by the reading of the Word. How comforting, and suitable to every case, are the varied experiences in the book of Psalms! What an example is furnished to the most afflicted, by the history of the patriarch Job, who confided in God amid the severest trials, and exclaimed, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!" How instructive, and consolatory, and appropriate, do many passages of the Prophets appear! What abundant consolation does the New Testament supply! In the holy Gospels the suffering Saviour is exhibited as our best exemplar in the trials of life, and in the agonies of death! The contemplation of his meekness, and faith, and patience, animates us to follow him with a similar mind. How often has the dying believer directed his mourning friends to read for him the consoling narrative of the resurrection of Lazarus, and of the tender sympathy of Jesus, in the eleventh chapter of St. John! How still more frequently has he requested to hear the farewell discourse of our blessed Lord with his disciples, and his comprehensive prayer, contained in the fourteenth and three following chapters! To what countless numbers of dying saints has this portion of God's word, proved as a strong staff of support, when walking through the valley of the shadow of death! How strengthening, also, is the perusal of the apostolical Epistles! The eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, teaches the believer to rise superior to earthly sufferings—assures him that "all things work together for good to them that love God"—and causes him to feel a blessed persuasion that "neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, shall be able to separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord." The fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to

the Corinthians establishes his hope of a "blessed resurrection"—informs him that "death itself, the last enemy, shall be destroyed"—and puts this triumphant song into his mouth, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the dying Christian is instructed so to "look at eternal things; as to count even the perishing of his outward man a light affliction, and but for a moment"—he is taught to be "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"—and he is gladdened by the assurance that "God was in Christ reconciling him unto himself, not imputing unto him his trespasses," chapters iv. and v. The Epistle to the Hebrews presents to him an unchangeable "counsel," and an inviolable "oath," that by "two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie," he might enjoy "strong consolation." And it sets before him the bright "examples" of innumerable believers from the beginning of the world, who "all died in faith," "confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and "declaring that they sought a better country, that is an heavenly," chapters vi. and xi. Lastly, the Book of Revelation displays that country to his view in the most distinct and inviting form; gives him to feel as though he were already acquainted with its beauty and its blessedness; and enables him, by a realizing faith, to meditate on the glorious "throne," the worshipping "elders," and the myriads of "angels:"—on the "white robed multitude, who hunger no more, neither thirst any more, but with palms in their hands and every tear wiped

from their eyes, serve God day and night in his temple :—and on the blessedness of those that are “called to the marriage supper of the Lamb, who have their part in the first resurrection !” He sees, as it were spread out before him, the “new heavens and the new earth,” where there is “no more curse,” because there is no more sin ; where is “no more pain, neither sorrow, nor crying, and no more death.” He surveys the “golden streets,” the “crystal river,” and the “ever-fruitle trees” of the “Holy City,” where there is “no temple, and no night, no sun and no moon,” but of which “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple” and the light, the glory and the joy :—and where the “tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God !”

Gazing intently on the beatific vision which the Book of Revelation presents so him, the enraptured saint delights to hear the threefold note of its concluding chapter : “Behold I come quickly !” ver. 7. “And behold I come quickly !” ver. 12. “Surely I come quickly !” ver. 20. And with his last expiring breath, he exclaims, “Amen. Even so, Come, Lord Jesus ;” and take me to thy home !

How many have witnessed in the chamber of death that the Spirit and the Word have thus afforded strong consolation to the departing Christian ! How often have weeping relatives beheld a brightening eye and a heavenly countenance, in their dying friend, as he expressed, at broken intervals, the sentiments of his heart ! “Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him.”—“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.”—In my

present condition what should I do, without an Almighty Saviour?—How should I feel, did I not possess a Divine Comforter?—"For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."—"My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."—"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."—"O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me."—"Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."—"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."—"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."—"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better!"

Fear no evil then, O Christian, when contemplating thy passage through the valley of the shadow of death.

Thy Shepherd will be with thee. The rod of his Spirit, and the staff of his Word, shall be employed to comfort thee. What the Lord has done for one member of his flock, he is both willing and able to accomplish for all. The experience of the Psalmist is the experience of believers to the present day. Hear the testimony of a late eminent physician, when passing through the valley of the shadow of death: "Christ is all in all to me. I have no hope except in him. He is indeed all in all!" To his departing spirit, a well-known voice softly repeated this animating verse, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me"—and he emphatically added, "They do comfort me. There is no darkness!"—*Memoirs of Dr. Hope.*

Fear no evil then, O Christian, when thou walkest through the valley of the shadow of death. Only be faithful to thy Shepherd, and all shall be well. The light of his *presence*, the rod of his *power*, and the staff of his *promise*, shall comfort thee in that dark and trying hour. No spiritual foe shall venture to approach, when thy Shepherd's presence is vouchsafed to thee! And thou shalt assuredly experience that there is no deliverance too great for his power to accomplish; and no consolation too precious for his promise to supply, in the valley of the shadow of death! Go forward then, O Christian, with confidence in the care and power, the love and wisdom, of thy heavenly Shepherd! The darkest shades of that valley shall be cheered with light as thou followest him. Thy doubts shall be dispelled! Thy fears shall be dispersed! Thy weakness shall be removed! Thy faith shall be increased! Thy love shall be made

strong ! Thy hope shall be made bright ! And with
a dying believer thou shalt be enabled to say,

It is told me I must die !
O happy news !
Be glad, O my soul !
And rejoice in Jesus thy Saviour !
If He intended thy perdition,
Would he have laid down his life for thee ?
Would he have expected thee with so much patience,
And given thee so long a time for repentance ?
Would he have drawn thee with so great force,
And crowned thee with so many graces ?
Would he have called thee with so much love,
And illuminated thee with the light of his Spirit ?
Would he have given thee so many good desires ?
Would he have set the seal of the Predestinate upon thee,
And dressed thee in his own livery ?
Would he have given thee his own cross,
And given thee shoulders to bear it with patience ?

II.

It is told me, I must die !
O happy news !
Come on, my dearest soul !
Behold thy Jesus calls thee !
He prayed for thee upon his cross ;
There he extended his arms to receive thee ;
There he bowed down his head to kiss thee ;
There he cried out with a powerful voice,
" Father, receive him, he is mine !"
There he opened his heart to give thee entrance ;
There he laid down his life to purchase life for thee !

III.

It is told me I must die !
O happy news !
I shall no more suffer pain :
I shall no more be guilty of sin :

I shall no more be in danger of being damned !
 But from henceforth
 I shall see, and I shall live ;
 I shall praise, and I shall bless ;
 And this I shall always do,
 Without ever being weary of doing what I always am to do !

IV.

It is told me, I must die !
 O what happiness !
 I am going
 To the place of my rest ;
 To the land of the living ;
 To the haven of security ;
 To the palace of my God ;
 To the nuptials of the Lamb ;
 To sit at the table of my King ;
 To feed on the bread of angels ;
 To see what no eye hath seen ;
 To hear what no ear hath heard ;
 To enjoy what the heart of man cannot comprehend !

V.

O my Father !
 O thou, the best of all Fathers !
 Have pity on the most wretched of all thy children !
 I was dead, but by thy grace am now raised again !
 I was gone astray after vanity,
 And am now ready to appear before thee !
 O my Father !
 Come now in mercy and receive thy child !
 Give him the kiss of peace ;
 Remit unto him all his sins ;
 Clothe him with thy nuptial robe ;
 Permit him to have a place at thy feast ;
 And forgive all those who are guilty of his death !

*From a Poem by RICHARD LANGHORNE, Esq., ADVOCATE, entitled
 "The Affections of my Soul, after Judgment given against me in a
 Court of Justice, upon the Evidence of False Witnesses ;" written
 about A.D. 1678.*

THE BANQUET.

THE TABLE PREPARED.

VERSE 5.—*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.*

A NEW scene is here opened before us. The Psalmist had spoken of himself as a sheep under the care of a good shepherd; he now describes himself as a guest entertained by a generous host. He had, as it were, exhausted the preceding metaphor. He had contemplated the sheep passing through life, protected, blessed, and happy: and he had beheld it walking without danger or alarm through the valley of the shadow of death! So great was his sense of the goodness of the Lord towards him, that he felt it impossible to do justice to the love and the care, the wisdom and the protection of his heavenly Friend. His soul delighted to expatiate on the pleasant theme. He knew that neither words nor metaphors, could sufficiently exhibit the excellency of his God. The greatness of the subject, and the fulness of his own heart, constrained him to employ one figure after another. Having taken his first emblematic representation from his own past history as a humble shepherd, a second was suggested by the entertainments now given in his honour at the royal court of Saul. In

this way, he teaches us that whatever is good and desirable in the different positions of society, is but a picture of the unrivalled goodness that is in God. The sweets we taste, the kindnesses we receive, the happiness we enjoy, the scenes of peace, or of plenty, which we behold on earth, should all lead us to look upward and say, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights."—They proclaim aloud that God is LOVE, most gracious and most bountiful!

David had experienced a remarkable and sudden elevation. The youthful shepherd had become a valiant warrior—and the attendant of a fold had now become an inhabitant of a court! His splendid victory over Goliath, his wide-spread fame as the deliverer of his country, his exalted honours as the favourite of the king, excited the envy and the hatred of many. He knew that some of Saul's servants regarded him as their rival, and entertained towards him no kindly sentiments. The king himself, however, was still his friend; nor had his mind as yet experienced any unfavourable change. David must have been conscious that he was the distinguished object both of popular and of royal favour. He basked in the sunshine of prosperity, even in the presence of his enemies. And his happiness must have been greatly increased by the fact, that they had not been able to deprive him of the usual tokens of the sovereign's regard. He could still observe that he was a welcome and an honoured guest. A "table was prepared before him" by the royal command "in the very presence of his enemies."

Such were the circumstances which, we humbly suppose, suggested this new figure to the mind of David. He does not mean to apply this spiritual

Psalm to these external circumstances ; but he seizes them as apt illustrations of the spiritual honours and happiness which he received from above. Jehovah was David's King, and David here speaks of himself as Jehovah's guest. Every true believer is the guest of God ! He enters into his house by express desire. He draws near to his presence by previous invitation. The King of heaven welcomes every believing soul to sit down at his royal table. He has furnished it with the abundance of his goodness, and never sends any empty away !

Both in the Old and in the New Testament Scriptures, God is represented as a generous Host ; and the salvation which he has provided for sinful man is described as a sumptuous feast to which we are freely invited, as a royal banquet already prepared and supplied in the most munificent manner. Though the gospel feast be indeed large and full, yet to the believers under the Old Testament dispensation there was also " enough and to spare." " They were abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house : and were made to drink of the river of his pleasures," Ps. xxxvi. 8. Hear the beautiful language in which the invitations of grace were addressed to them. " Wisdom hath builded her house ; she hath hewn out her seven pillars ; she hath killed her beasts ; she hath mingled her wine ; she hath also furnished her table ; she hath sent forth her maidens ; she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple let him turn in hither ; as for him that wanteth understanding she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live, and go in the way of understanding," Prov. ix. 1, 6. How closely does this correspond with

the invitation given in the parable by our Lord himself! "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, 'Tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage,' Matt. xxii. 2, 4.

Such are the gracious invitations addressed to believers under both dispensations. "The table is furnished." "The dinner is prepared." "The servants are sent forth." The guests are reminded that "all things are ready." Thus both to Jews and Gentiles the message has been delivered, and many have welcomed it with joy in all ages. The Psalmist gladly accepted the invitations of salvation. And every faithful Israelite, and every genuine Christian, finds, with David, that these invitations are not empty words. They can each adopt his testimony as their own, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

"*Table*" is a comprehensive term, and is used to denote all manner of provision which it may be usual, or needful, or desirable, to set thereon. And by this expression, "Thou preparest," the Psalmist would signify the active and gracious agency of God in providing whatever is necessary for man's salvation. He himself furnishes that table, therefore the supplies are always abundant, always suited to our wants, and always ready for our use! All manner of blessings are set before us on that table. Not one particular kind, but every species of spiritual provision is here presented to our enjoyment. As invited guests we bring nothing

with us but a humble sense of our own utter unworthiness, and a grateful sense of his marvellous loving-kindness. Nothing remains but that each guest sit down to partake; "Thou preparest a table before me."

How amazing is the goodness and condescension of God in thus himself becoming the provider for his people! Vast and unnumbered as they are, there is not one amongst them all whose circumstances he ever overlooks, or for whose wants he does not suitably provide! It is the Lord of hosts himself who makes "unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined," Isa. xxv. 6. Never then let the believer lose sight of this important fact, that for every blessing which he enjoys in time, or shall enjoy in eternity, he is solely indebted to the grace, and the generosity, and the forethought, of his heavenly Father. All God's mercies are *prepared* mercies. The "Lord has prepared of his goodness for the poor," Psa. lxxviii. 10. "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath the heart of man conceived, the good things which God hath prepared for them that love him," 1 Cor. ii. 9. "He hath prepared for them a city," Heb. xi. 16. The blessed Saviour is gone before "to prepare a place" therein for each of them, John xiv. 2. Ere long he will return again, and exalt his people to "inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world," Matt. xxv. 34.

At God's prepared table the richest variety of spiritual provision is to be enjoyed. Every blessing, suited to every state and taste, is here spread before us! Pardon and peace—wisdom and strength—life and

health—holiness and truth—consolation and sympathy—righteousness and redemption—love and joy—patience and meekness—brotherly kindness and humility—faith, and hope, and charity! So perfectly and completely has the Lord furnished his table, that there is nothing wanting. The mind of the Apostle was so filled with gratitude at the contemplation of it, that he exclaims, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," Eph. i. 3.

The blessings of salvation are all most freely and abundantly provided. They are fully prepared by God, and are ready for the use of every penitent sinner. It is a full pardon. It is a full peace. It is a full reconciliation, which is provided in the Lord Jesus. The sinner requires not to make these blessings more meet for his enjoyment. He is called to partake of salvation, as a guest is invited to partake of the hospitality of his friend. The words of the heavenly message are most explicit. "I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed; and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." The self-righteous preparations of man are thus wholly set aside. Boasting is excluded. No man can say that he has rendered any aid—that he has contributed any portion—that he has paid any price—or that he possesses any claim on the bounties of Heaven. On the contrary, salvation is altogether bestowed by free and sovereign grace. "Herein the kindness and the love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abun-

dantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour," Titus iii. 5. The Lord Jesus has already died. Pardon has been already procured. The Holy Ghost is already given. The Scriptures are already published. The table of grace is already prepared, and the very vilest of sinners is freely invited to partake. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness," Isa. lv. 1, 2. The poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind, are invited to come from the lanes, the highways, and the hedges, and to sit down at the marriage supper of the King's Son, Luke xiv. 21, 22.

Blessed be God, this banquet is not reserved to a future period. This table is not set in a distant place. It is prepared "*before*" us. "Thus saith the Lord, I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off; and my salvation shall not tarry," Isa. xlvi. 13. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," saith the blessed Saviour. "If any man hear my voice and open the door; I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me," Rev. iii. 20. This prepared table, laden with all the blessings of salvation, is placed before us in a spiritual manner. We behold it with the eye of faith. We draw near to it with our thoughts. We partake of it in our hearts. The believer has a present enjoyment of it. "He has meat to eat which the world knows not of." He "tastes that God is gracious." "His meditation of him is sweet" to his soul, and "he is glad in the Lord," Psa. civ. 34. He can

truly say with his Saviour, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Communion with the Saviour of his soul is the nourishment of the Christian's spiritual strength. He loves to draw near to the prepared table. He longs to see the King in his beauty. He "covets earnestly" to be admitted to his presence. And often he is enabled to say, "The King hath brought me into his chambers."—"Yea, he hath brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me is love," Cant. i. 4; ii. 4. Oh how the soul of the believer is strengthened by intercourse with God! He feeds at the table which God has prepared for him, and is refreshed and gladdened. As truly as the traveller is sustained by the food he eats while prosecuting a toilsome journey, so the child of God is invigorated to persevere in his heavenly course by partaking of spiritual blessings. Faint and languid as he may have felt only a little while before, he is now revived with energy and strength. He pursues his onward career with vigour and alacrity: and is sensitively convinced that a living virtue from on high has been imparted to his soul. He knows it from its effects. Whereas he was blind, he now sees. Whereas he was weak, he is now strong. He discerns the snares and the temptations of Satan, where he had not suspected they could lie concealed. He casts aside the besetting sin, which before he knew not how he could be able to put away. And he denies himself, and takes up his cross in the faithful discharge of some painful duty, which he had felt inclined rather to avoid. Thus the soul of the believer by partaking of that spiritual table which the Lord has graciously prepared

is fortified against the assaults of spiritual enemies, and strengthened for the service of his God.

This table may be said to have been prepared before the believing Israelites in each of their divinely appointed ordinances. At the feast of the Passover, and at the other beautiful and significant festivals of his holy religion, the heart of David must have exceedingly rejoiced to meet with God. "In all places where I record my name," said the Lord, (and surely the same may be said of every service he has instituted,) "I will come unto thee and I will bless thee," *Exod. xx. 24.* David had no doubt often experienced the fulfilment of this promise. The remembrance of it caused him to exclaim, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary," *Psa. lxxiii. 1, 2.*

In the exercise of social and secret prayer, it may be likewise said that a table of spiritual refreshment is prepared by God for his people. Here each believer may at all times draw near to God, and receive nourishment for his soul in its hungerings and thirstings after righteousness. The Psalmist was a frequent partaker at this table. "Seven times a day do I praise thee." "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness: and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." Thus both in public and in private the believing Israelites had free access to a spiritual table, which God had prepared before them. If they rejoiced because the Lord dealt so bountifully with them, how much more should the Christian appreciate the high privileges to which he is

called! The gospel feast is now spread out before us. God has given us a royal table. The blessings it presents, no human language can describe. One word comprehends them all! SALVATION! "SALVATION IS PREPARED BEFORE THE FACE OF ALL PEOPLE!" Salvation! The full remission of all our sins—complete and everlasting freedom from condemnation—eternal victory over Satan, sin, and hell! Salvation! an answer to our long offered prayers—the gratification of our holiest desires—and more than a fulfilment of our highest hopes! Salvation! deliverance in soul and body from all pain and sorrow, sickness and death—emancipation from all doubts and fears, and inward anxieties—rescue from every enemy—rest from every trouble—and entire sanctification of our whole nature! Salvation! admittance to our heavenly home—union for ever and ever with Christ our Lord—and complete fruition of that glorious God in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore!

The Lord Jesus did himself "prepare a table before his disciples," to which the Christian may be permitted to apply the words of the Psalmist in a sense which they did not originally bear. To carnal eyes, indeed, it appears but a table of bread and wine: yet to the spiritual eye it is a table of the "heavenly food of the most precious body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ." With the tenderest love he prepared that table on the "same night in which he was betrayed." He took the bread as an emblem of his broken body, and the cup as an emblem of his shed blood, and in giving them to his disciples to eat and to drink, he said, "Do this in remembrance of me!" No wonder, then, that the Christian regards it as a high privilege to be ad-

mitted to the table of his Lord. He longs for frequent opportunities to "show forth his death until he come again." He delights to testify his affectionate and grateful remembrance of his departed Saviour. And he faithfully receives these "creatures of bread and wine" as indubitable "pledges of his Redeemer's love:" for as certainly as he tastes these perishing elements, so surely does he believe that Jesus bled and died for his salvation! Thus he spiritually "discerns the Lord's body." He "feeds on him in his heart by faith with thanksgiving;" and he rejoices in Christ alone as the "food and sustenance of his soul in that holy sacrament." The true believer is at all times his Saviour's welcome guest, and especially at the sacramental supper. There he enjoys the fellowship of his Lord, and from inward experience can say with the Apostle, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" 1 Cor. x. 16.

The Psalmist declared that his Lord had prepared the table before him "in the presence of his enemies." This was a special cause of gratitude. David had many enemies. Their envy and malevolence, were bent continually to effect his downfall. Besides these personal and human enemies, David knew that he was surrounded by spiritual foes who sought his everlasting ruin. Unspeakable therefore was his consolation, to know that their designs against him were altogether ineffectual. The safety and sustenance which he enjoyed, both of soul and body, the Psalmist attributed entirely to his Almighty Friend. He cheerfully acknowledged that he was indebted for every mercy and for every deliverance, to the overruling

providence of his God. And great must have been the joy with which he perceived that neither the power nor the presence of his enemies could prevent the Lord from preparing a table before him, or exclude himself from its enjoyment.

All the children of God, in their measure, have similar experience. They are all surrounded by enemies; but their Lord provides for them: yea, and "places them on high above their foes." "With his favour does he compass them about as with a shield." He spreads a table before them even "in the wilderness." Satan beholds that spiritual feast. He cannot partake of it himself, and he seeks to hinder them that would. But neither his powerful assaults, nor his malignant purposes, nor his subtile contrivances, can deprive the believer of that refreshing and invigorating provision of which he ever finds an inexhaustible store in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is ever near to him. The promises are ever open to him. No power in earth, or in hell, can hinder his enjoyment of the ordinances of prayer and praise. In the most wonderful manner does the Lord show himself strong on behalf of them that love him. Where there is often least appearance of immediate succour, there the Lord makes bare his arm. The deadly purposes of Haman were all but accomplished against the devoted Jews. The man whom he most abhorred, seemed about to fall as a prey into his hands. But lo! in the wonderful providence of God a table was prepared for his favoured people in the presence of their enemies. The Jews had joy and gladness: and Mordecai received the honours which Haman had intended for himself!

Whether, then, the Christian be surrounded by human, or satanic foes, the Lord is on his side. A

table is prepared before him, in the presence of his envious and disappointed enemies. Even Satan, and all his host, shall behold the favour and exaltation bestowed on him who is an "Israelite indeed." Neither their malice, nor his own unworthiness, shall be the measure of the Lord's gracious dealings with him. Of his own goodness and mercy Jehovah shall prepare a table before him, where every want of his soul shall be amply satisfied through time and through eternity. If the heavenly King delight to honour any of the sons of men, who is that proud Haman that would dare to deny, or who is that humble Mordecai that would presume to decline!

The time is at hand when a table shall be prepared, around which all the family of God shall meet, and from which they shall never be withdrawn. "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven," Matt. viii. 11. With the prospect of admission to this table, our Lord cheered the hearts of his Apostles, saying, "Ye shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom," Luke xxii. 30. And again, as a warning to those who rejected his doctrine, and opposed themselves to his ministry, he solemnly declared, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the Prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God," Luke xiii. 29.

This table prepared for eternity, shall never be the object of scorn. Even the enemies who behold it, shall earnestly wish to be partakers of its blessings!

Oh unavailing wish ! They know, they feel, that it never can be fulfilled. They now believe that the joys of religion are substantial and great. Visionary and deceitful as they once regarded the people of the Lord, they are now convinced of their sincerity, and feel constrained to acknowledge that they alone were truly wise. They behold the happiness of the redeemed : and awfully indeed must it aggravate their misery to see the once despised saints welcomed as eternal guests at the prepared table, while they themselves are irrecoverably shut out !

Oh, what joy and gladness shall then animate the hearts of the redeemed ! Every doubt of their acceptance is for ever fled. They see that they are now within the everlasting mansion. They perceive that He who went before has indeed prepared a place therein for each of them. They feel that they are graciously welcomed at the table which he has prepared before them with all manner of spiritual and heavenly provision. They behold the King in his beauty. They hear the music of attendant angels. They meet with the faithful of all ages and of all countries. And they "sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Surely the ransomed of the Lord shall be assembled in Zion "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away," Isa. xxxv. 10.

THE HEAD ANOINTED.

VERSE 5.—*Thou anointest my head with oil.*

HAVING spoken of the gracious reception with which he was welcomed at the royal table, the Psalmist proceeds, in the remainder of this verse, to give a special description of the honours conferred upon him, and of the abundance provided for his enjoyment, by his Royal Host. These he represents by two most lively similitudes, borrowed from the customs of the oriental nations.

When entertainments are given at the houses of the rich or noble, it is customary to use a profusion of costly perfumes. No price is spared to procure the most pure and fragrant oils. Balsams, and a variety of odoriferous substances are mingled with the oil; and it is the privileged office of the principal domestics to anoint the head of each invited guest. Should the master of the house himself perform this ceremony on any favoured individual, it is considered one of the highest marks of esteem and honour which he can bestow. It is usual not only to anoint the person of the beloved guest, but also to put into his hands a cup of the choicest wine, filled to the brim and flowing over. "I once," writes a traveller, "had this ceremony performed on myself in the house of a great and rich Indian, in the presence of a large company. The gentleman of the house poured upon my head, my

hands, and arms, a delightful, odoriferous, perfume. He then put a golden cup into my hands, and poured wine into it, till it ran over; assuring me at the same time, that it was a great pleasure to him to receive me, and that I should find a rich supply in his house."—*Memoirs of Capt. James Wilson.*

Such are the customs of oriental hospitality by which the Psalmist illustrates, in a most instructive and significant manner, the distinguished honour, and the abundant supply, which his soul was enjoying as an invited guest at the heavenly banquet. No angelic servant was deputed to perform this service, but the King himself condescended to anoint him. "THOU anointest my head with oil."

The practice here alluded to, prevailed long before the days of David. We know that it still exists in eastern countries, and that it was a common custom in the time of our Saviour. When our blessed Lord came as an invited guest to the house of Simon, the omission of this tribute of respect, furnished a striking contrast between the self-righteous pharisee and the despised penitent. Simon himself, and all who heard the Saviour's words, must have felt, if they did not acknowledge, the justness of the rebuke which they contained. "My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment," Luke vii. 46. The honour here so ungraciously withheld by his host from our blessed Lord, had been conferred on David by the master of a feast. It is not improbable that Saul may have shown him this mark of his royal favour, when, amidst the national rejoicings, the son of Jesse publicly appeared as the conqueror of Goliath, and the chief guest at the King's banquet.

Be this as it may, the words of this Psalm teach us

that David lived in a constant recognition of the unseen God ; and sought to derive from every circumstance in life, some spiritual and eternal lesson. His head on some occasion had been anointed with oil by a friendly host : but his heart was elevated above earthly honours. He viewed them only as types of heavenly favour ; and his whole soul most earnestly desired the "honour which cometh from God only," John v. 44. Amid the plaudits of the populace, the praises of courtiers, and the smiles of royalty, David remembered that he owed all his elevation and prosperity to the blessing of the Lord. He took not the merit to himself. He did not attribute it to any mere human instrumentality. He looked upward with an enlightened and devout heart, and as it were declared, "These honours are all thy gifts, my heavenly King ; THOU anointest my head with oil."

These words, however, have a far higher meaning, than merely to attribute earthly honours to their proper source. The Psalmist uses them in a spiritual respect. Under the emblem of a "table prepared before him," he had just described that nearness of communion with his Lord, to which he had been admitted, and that fulness of blessings of which he was there a joyful partaker. And now he advances another step. He carries forward the emblem, and illustrates the joy and the honour of having the Holy Spirit shed forth from God upon his soul, by that joy and honour which the master of a feast confers upon a favoured guest, whose head he condescends to anoint with his own hand.

David had already enlarged on his security and blessedness as a believer, under the beautiful similitude of a sheep with its shepherd. He now contem-

plates, by this new figure, the honour to which as a believer he was exalted. He gives utterance to an advanced state of his experience. His faith is strong. He enters deeply into God's mind and purposes, and he rises from the feeling of his being simply a restored sheep, to that of his being an invited guest; from the consciousness of being only a servant, to that of his being a friend of God; from the conviction that "shame and everlasting contempt" were the only portion he deserved, to the conviction that honour and everlasting glory were the portion which God was graciously pleased to bestow.

It is just between these two states of feeling that the believer is to be continually upheld. He is safe and strong when they are equally present to his mind. They are as necessary to him on either side as were Hur and Aaron to the weak but interceding Moses. On the left hand is the conviction of his own unworthiness, stirring him up to greater earnestness. On the right hand is the persuasion of God's rich and sovereign mercy, animating his soul to "come boldly unto the throne of grace." The believer who does not habitually cultivate self-aborrence and humility will soon relax his importunity in prayer; and he who perceives not that "the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon him" will soon feel his heart dejected, and his hands cast down. The Psalmist possessed both these feelings. He trembled under a sense of the weakness and depravity of his own nature; and he rejoiced in the freeness and fulness of Divine grace. And when he here says, "Thou anointest MY head with oil," he is to be understood as expressing these two sentiments. He was astonished at the condescension of the King of heaven to one so unworthy as

himself; but still he would not allow his sense of unworthiness to tempt him to doubt, much less to deny, the fact of that condescension, or to deprive him of the joy and the honour it was intended to bestow. If the God of our salvation be pleased to set his love upon us, and to honour us with his Holy Spirit, why should we presume to decline his gifts because we are unworthy of them? To him alone our real unworthiness is fully known. And do we wish that he should deal with us only according to the measure of our deserts? Nay, rather let our unworthiness both magnify the riches of his grace, and stir up our own hearts to more earnest prayer for his Holy Spirit! David had often prayed for the Spirit of grace, and he was now enjoying the inward witness of that Spirit in his heart. He humbly received the gift of the Spirit as a mark of heavenly favour, as a token of everlasting honour, bestowed immediately by God himself; therefore he delighted to acknowledge it in language appropriate to the figure of a banquet, which he represents himself as enjoying, "Thou anointest my head with oil."

Jesus of Bethlehem is the true David. His single arm has slain that great adversary who defied all the armies of the living God. In honour of him as the victorious Conqueror, the heavenly banquet is prepared by God the Father. Jesus is the favoured and accepted guest. On his head alone the anointing oil is poured by the Master of the feast. "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad," Psa. xlv. 7. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost,"

Acts x. 38. He therefore is the honoured guest at the court of heaven. In the gospel we read that the King "made the marriage supper for his son." Our invitation comes only in and through that Son. We are accepted there, not in our own name, but as his "friends," John xv. 13. Seated, as it were, on his Father's right hand, he regards all the redeemed as his own, and his Father's guests, and thus graciously addresses them: "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved," Cant. v. 1. As a token of the love that he entertains for them, and of the honour he bestows upon them, he causes them to be anointed with the same pure and fragrant oil which had been poured upon his own head. Nay, he condescends to perform this office for them himself. He it is who spiritually anoints the head of each of his invited guests. "He which hath anointed us is God," says St. Paul, 2 Cor. i. 21. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," saith the beloved disciple, 1 John ii. 20. This unction from on high is a manifest proof to all Christians, that the Master whom they serve is accepted, and honoured, and exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high. "This Jesus," say they, "hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear," Acts ii. 33; and thus the believing Christian is enabled to appropriate the language of the believing Israelite in its highest sense, and to say with a grateful heart, "Thou anointest my head with oil."

Oil is one of those material substances which were employed by Divine command in the religious services

of ancient Israel. It is a most comprehensive and significant emblem of the presence and the powers of the Holy Spirit in the church of God. Oil penetrates, softens, heals, strengthens, and preserves: and also according to the mode, and the object of its application, it will gladden, consecrate, adorn, render fragrant, and illuminate. In all these various and important properties it represents to us the powers, and offices, the gifts, and graces, of the Holy Spirit. Oil forms also an essential part of the animal economy. It is necessary to the life, the strength, and the beauty, of all living substances. The Spirit of God, in like manner, is indispensable to the life and vigour, the holiness and happiness, of every believing soul. By some persons, oil is regarded as an efficacious antidote against poison; and in this respect also it would form a most appropriate emblem of that sacred Person in the Holy Trinity, whose quickening and sanctifying energy, alone counteracts the deadening and destructive influences of sin.

Under the Old Testament every vessel used in the service of God, and every priest occupied therein, was anointed with oil. *Exod. chaps. xxix. and xxx.* The High Priest was solemnly consecrated by pouring upon his head the "most holy anointing oil." Kings, also, and prophets were appointed to their respective offices in the same manner. He who gave the Spirit enjoined the use of the emblem. The living Spirit "proceedeth" from the Eternal Father. He bestowed the Holy Ghost on his beloved Son; and by Him, from the Father, the Divine Spirit is poured upon the church.

The great High Priest of the New Testament was not anointed with material oil. He was consecrated.

to his supreme office by the most holy anointing Spirit. Visibly as the oil was poured on the head of Aaron at his consecration, so did the Spirit of God descend upon the head of Jesus at his baptism. Then and there he was anointed to be the only Prophet, the only Priest, and the only King of his church. Our blessed Saviour could thus fully claim the titles of "THE MESSIAH," and "THE CHRIST." John i. 41. These two names respectively testify to the Hebrews and to the Greeks, that Jesus of Nazareth is "THE ANOINTED." The Master is called "*Christ*," because he is *the anointed one*: and all his true disciples, after him, are rightly denominated "*Christians*," because they are *anointed ones*. The oil of spiritual anointing which was poured on him, descends also upon them. He is the anointed Head of the mystical body, and they are the anointed members. The Spirit of God abundantly poured upon our great High Priest, was "like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments," Psal. cxxxiii. 2.

Who would not wish to be a partaker of this spiritual anointing? All unworthy as we are, the Holy Ghost will be freely and fully bestowed in answer to prayer. The argument of our adorable Redeemer is well fitted to encourage the most timid of his disciples. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke xi. 13. This gracious Spirit will confer gladness and honour upon every lowly supplicant. manifold and inestimable are the blessings which he bestows. The anointing Spirit, like oil, penetrates the inmost soul, softens our hard hearts, heals our spiritual

wounds, illuminates our darkened understandings, and strengthens and preserves our godly resolutions. He consecrates believers for God's service, fills them with joy, adorns them with holiness, and renders them as it were fragrant with the odours of righteousness. The sweet and precious ointments used in eastern entertainments graced the person of the guest, and rendered his presence agreeable to all. The Spirit of God bestows a moral fragrance upon the soul of the believer, and makes him acceptable to the Most High. The name of Christ "is as ointment poured forth," and the name of Christian is as a drop of that ointment. The Lord takes delight in his people, when he beholds them anointed with those spiritual graces of which the "chief spices" are emblematical, Cant. iv. 14. They are then comely and without offence before him. Their meekness and purity, their love and obedience, render them "dear children" in his sight. Oh, that every professing Christian were thus lovely and pleasant before God! Oh, that every one could say with Paul, "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ!" 2 Cor. ii. 15. May the anointing Spirit be poured more largely upon every member of the Church, that we may be acceptable guests at the Gospel feast, at the sacramental table, and at the heavenly and eternal banquet!

Be ambitious, O Christian, of the honour that cometh from God only. Diligently and daily strive to live as an anointed person. God has called us unto his kingdom and glory; and we exhort and charge every one of you, says the Apostle, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of him who so greatly dignifies you, 1 Thess. ii. 12. Oh, seek then for glory and honour and immortality, by patient

continuance in well-doing ! Rom. ii. 7. "Glory, honour, and peace," shall be conferred upon thee, with "eternal life." Let, then, "thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment," Eccl. ix. 8. Remember that "if any man have not" this anointing by "the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Thy Lord and Master walked in the Spirit. He loved righteousness, and hated wickedness. Therefore God, even his own God, anointed him with the oil of gladness. This also shall be thy portion. "If any man serve me," says the Saviour, "him will my Father honour," John xii. 26. Present thyself therefore unto God in the daily "living sacrifice" of obedience, Rom. xii. 1. It is a "reasonable service" on thy part. It is holy and acceptable before thy Lord. The offering up of the Gentiles is acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, Rom. xv. 16. God would exalt thee. Let not the world keep thee back from honour. Great, indeed, O believer, is the honour of being called to bear the Christian name ! As Jesus was anointed "above his fellows," so the faithful Christian is honoured of God above all his fellow-men. "The Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon him," 1 Pet. iv. 14.

O Christian, thou art an anointed man : an anointed woman ! God himself has anointed thee with the most holy oil. Thou art not only accepted, as a guest at the prepared table, thou art also honoured with a royal priesthood, 1 Pet. ii. 9. He has made thee a King and a Priest unto God and his Father, Rev. i. 6. Thy Lord has set thee apart, and honoured thee above every human being who has not the Spirit. Thou art a consecrated creature ! O live continually as such in

joy and holiness. Christ is coming "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe," 2 Thess. i. 10. Is he now "glorified" by thy christian conduct? Is he now "admired" in thy christian character? God grant that thou mayest be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ," 1 Pet. i. 7,—that at the heavenly banquet the Spirit of everlasting honour, and of endless happiness, may be poured upon thee by the Master of the feast, and that thou mayest have reason to testify with the Psalmist, "Thou anointest my head with oil."

THE CUP OVERFLOWING.

VERSE 5.—*My cup runneth over.*

THE Psalmist still represents himself as enjoying the hospitality of his Royal Friend. A table had been prepared before him in the presence of his enemies. His head had been anointed by the Master of the feast. And now he informs us of "the cup which he put into his hands, filled to the brim and flowing over." David had not only been received with honour, but he was also entertained with the utmost hospitality at the royal banquet. "My cup runneth over."

The term "cup" is used in a figurative sense in various passages of Scripture. In the language of common life we are accustomed to speak of "a cup of joy," and of "a cup of sorrow." These figurative terms denote the circumstances in which any individual is placed, whether of weal or of woe, of prosperity or of adversity. When David testifies that the wicked shall receive grievous punishments at the hand of God, he says, "This shall be the portion of their cup:" Psal. xi. 6. And again, when he would describe the blessedness of his own condition, he exclaims, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup," Psal. xvi. 5. So, likewise, in this text, when he affirms, "my cup runneth over"—he uses a term in harmony with the figure of a banquet which he had before em-

ployed, and denotes by it that the provision which God had made for him, and the portion which God had assigned to him, was abundant and overflowing.

By this familiar image of a "cup running over" he presents to our minds, in few words, a lively picture of that large and generous provision which the King of kings has made for his guests. It is not a measured quantity, but an unmeasured and overflowing fulness which the Lord supplies. The brief but expressive language of the Psalmist may be considered in a two-fold respect, referring to an abundance both of temporal mercies and of spiritual blessings. The whole sentiment will thus be applicable to the two-fold nature of the believer, so that he is enabled with all the emphasis of truth to declare, both as to his body and as to his soul, "My cup runneth over."

In the first place, then, we may consider this expression as indicating the enjoyment by the Psalmist, of an abundance of temporal mercies. God is not only the Creator, but the Preserver and the Benefactor of the universe. All creatures derive from him their being, and all depend on him for that sustenance which is necessary to maintain it. From the highest seraph that surrounds the throne of glory, to the meanest reptile that creeps upon the surface of our globe, all live upon the bounty of the Most High. That bounty is, like himself, immeasurable. "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things," Acts xvii. 25. "The eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season. He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing," Psal. cxlv. 16.

Go forth, O man! Survey the works of the Almighty Creator! Innumerable worlds surround thee—thyself a world! The same Lord that watches over thee, ex^a

tends his care equally to them. He who supplies thy wants, supplies the wants of angels. With all the planets in their course, the fixed stars in their position—near or remote to thee,—thy God is present ! The earth and air, the sea and sky, display alike his eternal power and Godhead, his beneficence and love ! Where teem not the living creatures ? Who can count up their numbers ? Is there but one fish in the sea—one beast alone in the forest—a single bird in the air—one solitary insect on the ground ? Say, has each creature but one want, and one sensation—one only mode of happiness—and one only kind of provision ? Nay rather, are not their wants and feelings, their desires and appetites, as varied and innumerable as are the modes of their enjoyment, and the kinds of nourishment which God has provided for them ? Throughout the universe, the supply from the Creator more than equals the demand of the creature. Who will presume to affirm, that the blessings of God are dealt out with such a sparing hand that He could not have given less ? On the contrary, are we not, from the universal testimony of nature, constrained to say, “O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! In wisdom hast thou made them all. The earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them, they gather. Thou openest thine hand ; they are filled with good,” Psa. civ. 24.

God distributes to all his creatures according to their several capacities of enjoyment. The capacity of each individual may be called his “cup,” according to the measure of which he is dealt with in the great feast

of life. The capacity of any vessel is determined by the quantity it can contain without injury to itself, or loss to its contents. It is a great point of wisdom for every man to ascertain his own capacity of enjoyment ! To none is this fully known, save only to Him out of whose fulness our supply is to be obtained. It is necessary to our happiness to know that God wisely deals with each of us according to our measure. How varied are the capacities of men ! One sustains no injury from that which almost destroys another ! The station and education of each individual, the peculiarity of his natural disposition, and of his mental temperament, qualify one man to overcome some kinds of temptation which ensnare others ; and to derive benefit from some sources of enjoyment, which prove only injurious to his fellows. Yet these very peculiarities of position and character often render their possessor more liable to fall where others stand ; and to suffer misery where they enjoy happiness !

The capacity, then, of his people to sustain without injury or loss, is the measure by which the Lord deals forth his blessings. Like a wise master he gives to every servant according to his ability. Like an intelligent teacher, he proportions his instructions to the progress and capacity of his pupils. Such is the general rule of God's universal providence. The exceptions to it, indeed, are many and remarkable, which our own restless discontent and insatiable ambition have occasioned. Instead of cherishing a thankful satisfaction with their allotted portion, there are many who look with envy upon the larger provision of others, and will not be persuaded that the things they so earnestly covet might prove destructive to their happiness. How many open to themselves fertile sources of misery, by

grasping after things which they can neither use nor enjoy! How often do we see the sudden acquisition of wealth bring nothing but moral ruin in its train! Evil propensities break forth, which had before lain dormant: and the active habits and useful occupations of life are exchanged for sloth and luxury and pride. On the other hand, how often do we behold the loss of property accompanied by moral gain! The indolent man becomes active, and the prodigal prudent. Virtues shine forth like stars in the darkness of night, which had not appeared in the sunshine of prosperity. Equanimity and patience, integrity and self-denial, wisdom and perseverance, transform the useless, into a useful, member of society, and render him an honourable example to the world!

The Lord alone knows what is best for us in this present life. And if every Christian would cheerfully consider his own capacity, he would find cause to acknowledge that his heavenly Father deals most liberally with him. He who possesses a contented spirit, will always find that there is enough within his reach, to cheer and to gladden his path through life. The true secret of human happiness is known only by him, whom divine grace has taught to "be content with such things as he has." The majority of mankind are miserable, simply because they set their hearts on the possession of that which they have not! Yet we may safely assert that within the range of every station in society, and of every individual in each station, there exists a full supply of the gifts of God. And were these gifts thankfully received and rightly used, they would furnish an abundant measure of pure and reasonable happiness.

Men too often imagine their own capacities to be

greater than they are. They flatter themselves that they can safely contain, and without detriment enjoy, all that God may bestow. Looking through a false medium, their cup is magnified in their own eyes, and though there should be poured into it the richest gifts of God, they would still complain that it did not run over ! Measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves, they are not wise, 2 Cor. x. 12. The "wisdom that is from above" teaches the believer to "consider others better than himself;" and instructs him to take a true view of his own limited capacity. He learns to count the smallest mercies great : and by receiving all the bounties of God in the littleness of his own cup, he always finds that he has good cause to praise him for its overflow. A false view of our own merits and capacities, leads us to form a wrong estimate of the Lord's providential allotments. It creates dissatisfaction with them. We unbelievably measure his goodness by our own fancied greatness. But when the converted soul has tested its own capacity by the standard of God's word ; and has ascertained that its deservings at his hand are only everlasting ruin and confusion ; then it readily acknowledges the richness and variety of the Lord's unmerited mercies—"I am a sinner, and have no claim on God for the smallest token of his favour. I am a weak creature—I can do nothing ! I am a vain creature—I can bear nothing ! All the dealings of my God are mercy, unmeasured mercy ! The least drop of his goodness, far exceeds my utmost merits ! But for the supply of the Spirit of grace in Christ Jesus, I should abuse to my own hurt the most useful of his innumerable gifts. His Divine teaching, however, enables me to regard even the most trying afflictions

as mercies in disguise. I am altogether at God's disposal; and, without injustice, he might consign me at once to everlasting ruin. 'Why then should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?' That I am still alive, and not sunk in perdition, is a mercy which I owe entirely to his goodness, and not to my own merits! Oh yes, every hour I live, every breath I draw, the food I eat, the raiment I wear, my rest by night, my peace by day, the sunshine I behold, the friends I enjoy, all proclaim to my soul the abundant goodness of my God, and constrain me to say with David, "My cup runneth over!"

If the goodness of God be thus conspicuous in the natural world, how much more evident is it in the spiritual? Every believer in Christ Jesus who reflects on the value of his soul, and the magnitude of the gospel salvation, may confidently assert, "My cup runneth over." In the great Redeemer there is given to him a cup overflowing with spiritual blessings. "In Him are freely given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness," 2 Pet. i. 3. Therefore the Apostle St. Paul exclaims, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS in heavenly places in Christ," Eph. i. 3. Well then may every true Christian declare, "My cup runneth over."—"In Christ is contained an abundant supply for every possible want of my immortal soul! From him flow strength for my weakness:—health for my sickness:—wisdom for my ignorance:—forgiveness for my guilt:—and peace and consolation for my every sorrow! Yea, whatever be my want, 'my God shall supply all my need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus!'"

The cup of Christian privilege is full, indeed, and overflowing! In secret prayer, in Scripture study, in public worship, the believer drinks of a cup that overflows with grace and goodness. He meditates often on the richness and vastness of the Divine beneficence towards him. He endeavours to calculate the number and the magnitude of the blessings which the Lord has showered upon him. He trembles lest he should be guilty of overlooking even the smallest amongst them. While other men are recounting their miseries, the humble believer is rehearsing his mercies! "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's," *Psa. ciii. 2—5*. At the review of all that God has done for him, his heart is filled with gratitude, and he exclaims, "What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." He presents himself therefore with delight among the invited guests at the spiritual banquet of his heavenly Host. At the table of the Lord, in a particular and gracious manner, "the cup of blessing" is put into his hand, and he drinks thereof to the satisfying of his soul. It is, indeed, to him "the communion of the blood of Christ." He partakes of the pardon, and he enjoys the peace, of which it is the outward and visible sign. That cup is a pledge of love between the gracious Host and his grateful guest! The wine of salvation cheers the heart of the believer. The various graces of his spiritual life are quickened. Faith

is strengthened. Love is increased. Hope is revived. Holiness is deepened. Joy breaks forth. And gratitude abounds. He blesses the Lord for the soul-refreshing draught, and exclaims, "My cup runneth over!"

Let the Christian, then, ever remember that it is neither his own capacity, nor his own deserts, that constitute his cup. It is out of the fulness of our Emmanuel that "all we receive, and grace for grace," John i. 16. The Son of God in our nature is the overflowing cup, which He, who furnishes the feast, puts into the hand of every invited and honoured guest. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell," Col. i. 19. In ourselves we have nothing; but in Christ Jesus we have a *full salvation*—as much *grace* as we can need in time, and as much *glory* as we can enjoy throughout eternity! "All things," says the Apostle, "are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's," 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

O what an overflowing cup is this! "All things are ours in Christ!" And "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily! And in him we are complete!" Col. ii. 9. Rejoice, then, O anointed believer! The grace provided for thee in thy Saviour is unmeasurable and inexhaustible. Drink ever freely of thy overflowing cup. All things are thine. God the Father is thy Father. God the Son is thy Brother. God the Holy Ghost is thy Comforter. The angels are thy attendants. The redeemed are thy companions. And heaven is thy home! O drink

continually of thy overflowing cup; and taste every spiritual blessing it contains!

Meditate on the great and glorious Jehovah—three Persons, and one essence—spiritual, invisible, and eternal—dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, but which thou shalt behold! Meditate on the perfect nature, and the glorious majesty, of thy Almighty Father, who filleth heaven and earth with his presence! His holiness underived, unsullied, and incorruptible. His wisdom unsearchable and omniscient. His power unlimited and irresistible. His truth unerring. His faithfulness unfailing. His justice impartial. His goodness universal. His long-suffering unwearied. His mercy everlasting. His love unequalled in its tenderness, and surpassing knowledge in its greatness; at once disinterested and undeserved! Oh think on this All-Perfect and Eternal King, who sitteth on the throne of the universe! Think of him as thy Creator, thy Preserver, thy Benefactor, thy Friend, thy Father!—Think how thou hast free access to him, and full acceptance with him, at all times, and in all conditions—that every hour, and every moment, his providence is engaged in determining, sustaining, and dispensing all things, and for all created beings, in heaven and in earth;—that even the darkest and most mysterious steps of that providence are ordered in wisdom, truth, and love; preserving thy breath, directing thy paths, providing thy mercies—ruling and overruling all events for thy good!—And consider that His favour is thy life, thy shield, and thy consolation, by night, by day, asleep, awake, at sea, on shore, in all places, at all times, and under all circumstances; in days of prosperity, in periods of persecution, in seasons of joyful intercourse with thy

but waft thee onward to thy destined haven ! That over tribulation, and distress, and persecution, and famine, and nakedness, and peril, and sword, thou shalt be made more than a conqueror ! That even death itself cannot separate thee from thy God, but shall usher thee into his immediate presence ; and wilt thou not say, " My cup runneth over ? "

Innumerable, O believer, are the blessings of which thou art called to partake at the gospel feast on earth, and at the everlasting banquet in heaven ! Thy hospitable Lord presents to thee a cup overflowing with all the blessings of salvation ! Each of them is invaluable in itself, and immeasurable in its fulness ! Learn from one, how to estimate them all ! Pardon of sin is as free as thy heart can desire, and as complete as thy mind can conceive. The Lord forgiveth " iniquity, and transgression, and sin," that is, all kinds of offences, Exod. xxxiv. 7, " I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men," Matt. xii. 31. " And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have sinned against me ; and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me," Jer. xxxiii. 8. " The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," 1 John i. 7. Yea, the most heinous sins God promises to pardon. " Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isa. i. 18. The Lord is not only ready to forgive, but willing to forget. " For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more," Heb. viii. 12. And that they may never appear against thee, thy Lord removes them as far

away as the east is from the west. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us," Psa. ciii. 12. Yea he casts them all into the depths of the sea. "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea," Mic. vii. 19. Yea he blots them out as a thick cloud. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee," Isa. xlv. 22. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," Isa. xliii. 25.

If one ingredient in the cup of salvation be so rich and so inestimable, what shall we say of the combined fulness and sweetness with which it overflows? The mingled blessings of time and of eternity, of grace and of glory, constitute that cup of salvation which God has given to us in Christ. It is a royal gift, worthy of his own munificence!

Who can reckon up the mercies and the blessings, the privileges, the honours, and the joys, with which the glorious Gospel overflows? Here is life for the dead, light for the blind, deliverance for the captives, food for the hungry, water for the thirsty, riches for the poor, robes of righteousness for the naked, rest for the weary, relief for the oppressed, strength for the weak, instruction for the ignorant, peace for the troubled, and consolation for the afflicted! Here we obtain conviction of sin, and conversion of soul: genuine repentance towards God, and unfeigned sorrow for all transgression; with power to forsake iniquity, and to persevere in righteousness! Here the conscience of the sinner is filled with peace, and his spirit with pa-

rity! He is justified from the guilt he had incurred, and sanctified from the pollution of his nature. He obtains adoption into the family of God, and reconciliation with his heavenly Father. He partakes of union and communion with the Lord of life, and is blessed with wisdom and knowledge, with righteousness and truth, with obedience and resignation, with direction and security, with help and comfort, with patience and courage, with contentment and humility, with gentleness and charity, with meekness and heavenly mindedness! Here his faith, and love, and hope, and joy abound. "He tastes that God is gracious;" and enjoys free access to him, and full acceptance with him, in the closet, at the family altar, in social prayer, and in public worship! Grace overflows his soul as he reads the sacred Scriptures, examines his own heart, listens to the preaching of the gospel, joins in the melody of praise, and participates in the sacramental ordinances!

Many also and inestimable are the privileges which the Gospel confers. We are made by it New Creatures, Children of God, Friends and Brethren of Christ, Temples of the Holy Ghost, Fellow Citizens with the Saints, Heirs of Salvation, and Joint Heirs with Christ: a Chosen Generation, a Peculiar People, a Royal Priesthood, and more than Conquerors over sin and Satan, the world and the flesh! What shall we more say? for the time would fail us to tell of all the blessings which are contained in the cup of salvation! One word unfolds them all, REDEMPTION! Oh, who shall declare the fulness, the richness, the sweetness, of the REDEMPTION CUP! Emancipation from all curse! Introduction to all blessing! Perfection of our whole nature! Continual supplies of grace!

Everlasting possession of glory! Resurrection from the dead! A spiritual and immortal body! Life imperishable! Happiness inexhaustible! And honours unparalleled! Kings and Priests unto God! A kingdom in heaven! Palms of triumph! Harps of gold! Crowns of glory! Enjoyment of the blissful presence of the Triune Jehovah for ever and for evermore!

Drink then continually, O anointed believer, of thy full cup of salvation! The Lord himself has prepared it. Thy heavenly Host has filled it for thee! Thou art privileged to drink the cup of the redeemed from thy Redeemer's hands! Receive it with the warmest gratitude! Rejoice, and be exceeding glad! Thy "cup runneth over!" It overflows with GRACE to comfort thee in time! It shall overflow with GLORY to gladden thee throughout the endless ages of eternity!

My Shepherd is the Lamb,
The living Lord, who died!
With all that's truly good, I am
Most plenteously supplied!
He richly feeds my soul
With manna from above.
And leads me where the rivers roll
Of everlasting love.

He seeks me when I stray:
Directs my every path:
And when I walk through death's dark way,
Draws near with rod and staff.
My table He doth spread
In presence of my foes:
With oil He doth anoint my head:
My cup with wine o'erflows.

Goodness and mercy wait
On all my steps through life;

They'll bear me to the heavenly gate,
And set me free from strife.
Then I my Shepherd's care
Shall praise ; my Host adore :
And in his Father's house shall share
True bliss for evermore !

ANON.

THE CONCLUSION

GOODNESS AND MERCY.

VERSE 6.—*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

By two beautiful and instructive metaphors the Psalmist has exhibited before us the grace and goodness of Jehovah. The tenderness of his watchful care has been portrayed in the character of a Shepherd, and the munificence of his providing love has been exemplified in the character of a Royal Host. The Psalmist has given us likewise a representation of his own condition, as that of a sheep following the footsteps of that faithful Shepherd, enjoying the highest happiness, and experiencing the greatest safety; neither feeling any want, nor fearing any evil. And again he has described himself as a highly welcomed guest at the banquet of that heavenly Friend, where a table is prepared before him even in the presence of his enemies; where he is distinguished with honour by the Master of the feast, and partakes of an overflowing abundance of the most choice and delightful provision!

Having thus spoken of the past and the present, the Psalmist turns to the future, with joyful contemplation, in this concluding verse of his most interesting and instructive Psalm. He does so in the most beautiful, appropriate, and triumphant manner. That watchful

Shepherd, that hospitable Friend, he is assured will never leave him nor forsake him. He places, therefore, the fullest confidence in his unchanging love ; and in language still harmonizing with his own poetic imagery, and referable to himself both as a sheep and as a guest, he exclaims, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Such is the conclusion which the Psalmist draws from the review of his past history, and of his present experience ! Such is the animating hope for the future which the immutability of the Divine character, and the faithfulness of the Divine promises, warranted him to entertain ! We have seen that David commenced and continued this Psalm with strong expressions of reliance upon God. He uttered a blessed sentiment in the very first verse, and declared, "I shall not want." And now in the last verse he rises from the negative to an affirmative declaration: and with a still more blessed feeling he exclaims, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life !" He no longer uses the figurative terms by which he had adorned his Psalm. To our surprise and edification he suddenly puts aside all emblems and metaphors ; and plainly intimates, as it were, that in all his allusions to natural things, his design was to show forth the reality, the abundance, and the preciousness, of those spiritual blessings with which God had so graciously enriched him. He now speaks in the common language of men, that we may the more easily identify his experience with our own ; and feel encouraged to follow the footsteps of the good Shepherd, to accept the invitations of the heavenly King, and to appropriate to ourselves all the blessings of the "great salvation !"

The words of the Psalmist are expressive of the strongest confidence and certainty. He says, "*Surely.*" No doubt existed in his mind. His eye was fixed entirely on the spontaneous love and the almighty power of God. He felt that it would be both gross presumption, and vile ingratitude, after all he had received, to harbour a single doubt or suspicion of the ability or the willingness of Jehovah, to supply all his wants to the latest moment of his existence. David had not lost sight of his own unworthiness. A humbling consciousness of it was ever present to his mind. But he knew that it must have been entirely of His own good pleasure that Jehovah had graciously condescended to become his Shepherd and his Friend. He felt that it was indeed of his own mere mercy and grace—"for his own name's sake,"—that the Lord had at all deigned to bestow upon him a single blessing. And arguing from the gracious and perfect nature of the Divine love towards him, he could not legitimately arrive at any other conclusion than that which he has here so happily expressed. The confidence of the Psalmist was placed, not in the integrity of his own character, but in the unchangeableness of his God. He could not, and he does not, affirm that he himself shall never fail in faith, nor falter in obedience; but he does avow his conviction that the loving-kindness of the Lord shall never be taken away from him. His assured expectations are not directed to earthly grandeur, or to temporal happiness, or to his ultimate elevation to the throne of Israel. The chief desire and strong confidence of his heart are fixed on the attainment of spiritual happiness, of eternal riches, and of a heavenly kingdom! This was an established principle in the mind of David, from the commencement, to the con-

clusion, of his religious course. It was his dying sentiment. "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it" (that is, my house,) "not to grow," 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. David could let go his hold of temporal blessings, but never would he relax his grasp of those wherein lay "all his salvation and all his desire!" He trusted implicitly to a covenant-keeping God for the unfailing supply of those spiritual and eternal blessings which are indispensable to the life and the happiness of an immortal being!

The Psalmist here specifies two blessing most needful and appropriate for every sinner, "goodness and mercy"—Goodness that shall supply him when he is in want—and Mercy that shall forgive him when he sins:—Goodness following to provide, and Mercy following to pardon. Not goodness alone, nor mercy alone, but goodness *and* mercy in inseparable companionship! Goodness, with its ample gifts, and ceaseless providings, is not enough for an erring creature who is daily contracting guilt. And Mercy, with its pardons multiplied, and its long-forbearing love, is not enough for a needy creature who cannot nourish or sustain itself. It is, then, goodness and mercy united, in which the Psalmist rejoices, and of which he here assures his soul. "Goodness," that is, the bounty, the loving-kindness, the benevolence of Jehovah, shall follow me, and shall supply all my wants! And "mercy," that is, the pity and compassion, the forbearance and the forgiveness, of Jehovah, shall also follow me, and shall pardon all my sins and shortcomings!

The Psalmist speaks as if he beheld two guardian angels commissioned to attend his earthly pilgrimage. He regards them as handmaidens from heaven, waiting upon his soul continually. The name of the one is Goodness, and the name of the other is Mercy. In all the windings of the narrow way, whether ascending the highest mountains, or descending the deepest valleys,—whether passing through the slough of despondency, or toiling over the rocks of difficulty, these faithful messengers of God shall attend his steps. They shall accompany him not only in the pleasant sunshine, but also through the louring storm. They are the servants of the good Shepherd. They faithfully follow every sheep of His flock, as it follows the footsteps of their Master. And not more surely does every true member of that flock desire to follow the heavenly Shepherd, not only for a day, or a month, or a year, but throughout his whole existence, so surely shall Goodness and Mercy follow him with constant ministrations of love to his latest moment. They shall follow me, says the Psalmist, “all the days of my life.”—“These two attendants on either side shall cheer my spirit, and invigorate my heart, as I journey to my heavenly home: the one shall procure me a full supply for all my necessities; and the other shall assure me of a full forgiveness for all my sins!”

But the desponding Christian may say, “How can I appropriate such happiness to myself? Surely this is too much for any man to say, in this chequered scene—at least for *me*! Must I not encounter labours and troubles, losses and bereavements, sicknesses and death? How, then, can I affirm that goodness and mercy shall follow me?” Yes, O believer, goodness

and mercy shall follow thee through all these vicissitudes! The Psalmist himself did not assert that he should be exempted from such sorrows. Oh no! His faith is not fanaticism. He keeps all these afflictions steadily in view, as "not joyous, but grievous" parts of his appointed pilgrimage; but still he believes that goodness and mercy from the Lord shall assuredly follow him. Is there no kindness in the heart of the physician when he prescribes a bitter medicine for thy cure? Is there no mercy in the bosom of that father who gently chides his child to save him from greater punishment? Even the howling tempest testifies the goodness and the mercy of Providence. Does it not bestir the stagnant atmosphere, disperse the unwholesome vapours, and make the sun himself appear more clear? In like manner the trials of this passing life rouse up the slumbering Christian, dispel his misty doubts, his cloudy fears, and oft bequeath to him a bright sunshine of peace! Therefore "*despise* not these chastenings of the Lord." Do not speak and act as if there were neither goodness nor mercy in them:—as if they were curses instead of blessings! Honour these afflictions! They are the medicines of thy heavenly Physician, and will effect thy cure! They are the chidings of thy spiritual Father, and will save thee from eternal punishment!

Goodness and mercy are assuredly mingled with all the dispensations of the Lord. Each of his children has learned to acknowledge this truth, and to say, "It was good for me that I have been afflicted!" O yes! From first to last "the whole paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." Goodness and mercy mark the past!

Goodness and mercy gladden the present ! Goodness and mercy gild the future !

Hope is a joyous and animating emotion. It is the spring of life. "We are saved by hope," writes the Apostle of the Lord. Confidence in the promises of a friend, who will never deceive, leads us gladly forward. Our expectations rise in proportion to our knowledge of his intentions, and our reliance on his integrity. The believer lives on promise. He has a Friend above. That Friend has passed his word :—He has given his promise, saying, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," Heb. xiii. 5. Surely, therefore, upon the word and the character of God, the Christian may confidently rely, without presumption, and affirm, "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." But the desponding believer may still hesitate, and reply, "What right have I to appropriate this promise, or boldly to conclude from it as the Apostle does, 'that the Lord is my helper?'" We answer, You have the same right to appropriate this promise as St. Paul possessed, and that too with equal boldness. You observe the Apostle does not adduce this promise as having been specially addressed to his own soul. He knew that it was originally spoken to the church of old ; but he appropriates it to himself, and to the Christian Church, because he also knew that the promises were made to Christ, Gal. iii. 16, and that "all the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him, Amen, to the glory of God the Father," 2 Cor. i. 20. Every promise, then, contained in Scripture is centered and treasured up in the Lord Jesus. We have no right to claim the fulfilment of any one of them ; but Christ has a full right and title to the performance of them all. The blessedness of the gospel message con-

sists in this, that Christ has made himself one with his people, and freely offers to their use all that he possesses. He calls upon us to make use of his claims, and to enjoy the benefit of his privileges. What is his by right, becomes ours by grace. All the promises of God are ours in him. In ourselves we are bankrupt, but in Christ we have a Surety, who is infinitely rich, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, Col. i. 19.

It is of great importance for every Christian fully to understand, and continually to remember, that his standing before God is only in the suretyship of the Lord Jesus. This is the "glorious gospel of the blessed God," which is "commanded to be made known to all nations for the obedience of faith," that Christ Jesus is our appointed Surety, and has given us full warrant and title to use all his rights and privileges as if they were our own! He who believes these glad tidings will rejoice in proportion as he comprehends their import, and relies upon their truth. As he grows in grace and in the knowledge of his Lord, he will rise from one degree of confidence to another. From the full assurance of faith, Heb. x. 22, he will attain to the full assurance of understanding, Col. ii. 2, and thence, to the full assurance of hope, Heb. vi. 11. He will exult in that Surety of the better covenant, Heb. vii. 22, who so graciously says, Ask in my name,—Pray in my name—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you," John xvi. 23. Great, indeed, is the privilege here given to plead his gracious name, and most precious is the promise here attached to its use in prayer. The very best of men are unworthy of such a privilege and promise. Yet there is not one of

the sons of Adam but shall be made welcome to them both "in Christ." "Him that cometh unto me," says the Saviour, "I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," Rom. x. 12, 13.

The promises of God comprehend all manner of blessings, and are applicable to all the varied conditions of life! In whatever state and circumstance the Christian is placed, he will find a promise suited to his case: for "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. iv. 8. And it is because he can always lay hold, in the Scriptures of truth, of an appropriate promise, that he is warranted boldly to affirm with the Psalmist, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life!"

Is the believer in need? The Word of God extends to him promises of food and raiment! "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you," Matt. vi. 31—33.

Is the believer trembling and fearful, and exposed to danger? Here are promises of safety and protection! "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, he shall preserve thy soul," Ps. cxxi. 7. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow

thee ; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," Isaiah xliii. 2.

Does the believer stand in doubt and difficulty ? Here are promises of guidance and direction ! "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths," Prov. iii. 6. "I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go ; I will guide thee with mine eye," Psa. xxxii. 8. "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left," Isa. xxx. 21. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him," James i. 5.

Is the believer persecuted and distressed ? Here are promises of refuge and deliverance ! "The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed : a refuge in times of trouble," Psa. ix. 9. "He shall deliver thee in six troubles ; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee," Job v. 19. And when he is pining in sickness and declining in years, what rich promises are supplied to sustain him ? "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing. Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness," Psa. xli. 3. "And even to your old age I am he ; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear : even I will carry, and will deliver you," Isa. xli. 4.

Is the believer poor and friendless ? Here are promises to the poor, the fatherless, and the widow ! "The needy shall not always be forgotten : the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever," Psa. ix. 18. "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor

also, and him that hath no helper," *Psa. lxxii. 12.* "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation," *Psa. lxxviii. 5.* "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me," *Jer. xlix. 11.*

Does the believer mourn over sin, and yearn after purity of heart? Here are promises of pardon and sanctification! "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," *Isa. i. 18.* "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," *1 John i. 7.* "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh," *Ezek. xxxvi. 26.*

Is the believer fearful that his prayers are unheard? Here are promises of most gracious answers! "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me," *Psa. l. 15.* "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," *Matt. vii. 7.* "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it," *John xiv. 14.* "And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear," *Isa. lxxv. 24.* "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain," *Isa. xlv. 19.* "They shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God," *Zech. xiii. 9.*

Is the believer exposed to temptations? Here are

promises of grace to overcome them all! "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it," 1 Cor. x. 13. "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness," 2 Cor. xii. 9. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations," 2 Pet. ii. 9. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," John xvi. 33. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," Rom. xvi. 20. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," James iv. 7. "The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil," 2 Thess. iii. 3.

Does the believer look anxiously forward to the future? Here are promises of the favour and presence of his God. "Zion saith, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me! Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," Isa. xlix. 14. "Fear thou not: for I am with thee," Isa. xli. 10. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," Matt. xxviii. 20. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Luke xii. 32. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," Rev. ii. 10.

What a treasury of promises is here laid open to the believer! The Bible is a storehouse inexhaustible! It abounds with rich, and suitable, and precious blessings. Divine wisdom has adapted them to meet every variety of experience, and to administer all the sup-

pert, or guidance, or consolation that may be necessary. No condition in life is left unsupplied. An appropriate promise is provided for every person, and for every position. Therefore in every circumstance the believer should rejoice in the goodness and mercy of his Lord. He should place the firmest reliance on the fulfilment of every word which God has spoken. "He is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Numb. xxiii. 19. The promises are immutable. "It is impossible for God to lie." Flee hither, then, for refuge, O tried believer! Thou shalt enjoy "strong consolation." Flee from doubtings of God's love. Give no indulgence to unbelieving fears. Lay hold on the hope set before thee. Grasp the promises with a firm faith. They were made to be believed. They are given to thee in Christ to be trusted in, and acted upon!

Again, then, we would repeat that it was only because David relied on the character of God, and on the veracity of his promises, that he was enabled thus joyfully to affirm, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Like him, let us also encourage ourselves in the Lord our God. Make God in Christ, O Reader, the beginning, the continuance, and the end of your confidence. Learn that it was not for the sake of any virtue which you possessed that God at first bestowed his good-will upon you:—that it is not on account of any value that you are to him, that he now exhibits mercy and forbearance towards you:—and that it is not for any services which you may hereafter render, that his goodness and mercy shall follow you in the future! Learn

that it is of his own excellent nature, and for the glory of his own great name, that he takes any gracious notice of such sinners and rebels as we are. "He is good," and therefore he doeth good. "He is love," and therefore he showeth love, even to the dead in trespasses and in sins. This is, indeed, a most humiliating doctrine. It lays all self-righteousness in the dust. There let it ever lie! The tottering fabric of human merit—raze it, raze it, even to the ground! Let the foundations of it be utterly destroyed: and let the beautiful building of a holy and heavenly hope be erected on the new "foundation which God hath laid in Zion," Isa. xxviii. 16. "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. iii. 11. By our own natural doings we can only bring ourselves under the curse of a broken law. "For cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But in Christ Jesus we are delivered from that merited condemnation. As it is written, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," Gal. iii. 10, 13. But for the imputed righteousness of this great Surety we could have no hope. Has not the Apostle given us a fourfold description of our natural state, which is enough to overwhelm us with fourfold despair? Does he not affirm that by nature we are "without strength," that we are "ungodly," that we are "sinners," and that we are the "enemies" of God! O how can a weak, ungodly sinner, who is the enemy of his Maker, be acceptable before him, or merit admission into his heavenly presence? But while the Apostle thus overthrows every mere human hope; while he leaves not one stone upon another in the building of self-right-

eousness that is not thrown down; does he not at the same moment, and in the very same verses, seek to build us up in Christ Jesus? Does he not most blessedly declare that "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly?" Does he not aver that "God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us?" Does he not argue that "if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life?" "And not only so," does he not also lead us forward to "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement?" Rom. v. 6—11.

Reader, dost thou wish to be built up in Christ, and to rejoice in God? Examine thyself. Hast thou also "received the atonement?" Dost thou regard the Lord Jesus as all thy salvation, and all thy desire? The prophet has declared that all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on his Son the iniquity of us all! Isa. liii. 6. Dost thou believe this? Dost thou believe that God hath laid thy sins on the head of Jesus; and that he is not imputing unto thee thy trespasses? 2 Cor. v. 19. Hast thou cordially accepted this gracious act on the part of thy heavenly Father? And dost thou gratefully receive the atonement which thy provided Surety has made for thy sins? See, then, to what that atonement legitimately conducts thee, to "joy in God through Jesus Christ!" Yes, the atonement is the grand foundation of our hope. It is the only basis of pardon for the past, acceptance for the present, and joy for the future! Christ Jesus has made atonement for our sins, and has "brought in an

everlasting righteousness!" He "hath blotted out as a thick cloud our transgressions, and as a cloud our sins." And he calls upon us to "return to him, because he hath redeemed us!" "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it. Shout, ye lower parts of the earth. Break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel," Isa. xlv. 22, 23.

Great and marvellous are the goodness and mercy of Jehovah which flow forth through the atonement! The believer therefore cleaves continually to the Redeemer. Goodness and mercy ever follow him, and form the themes of his unceasing thanksgivings. "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses," Isa. lxiii. 7. The very name of God declares to us his goodness and his mercy. The name revealed to Moses on the mount of Sinai, has been revealed to us in blood upon the mount of Calvary. There Jehovah stood and proclaimed his glorious name. "The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty," Exod. xxxiv. 6.

David had learned that name in the writings of Moses. He did not learn it in vain. He placed his whole trust in the character of God which it revealed. See how in many of his Psalms he rejoices in the

union of goodness and mercy which he had found in God. "The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting," *Psa. c. 5.* See how he calls on others to exult in the same God. "Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever," *Psa. cvii., cxviii., and cxxxvi.* See how he declares that these shall form the subjects of wonder and rejoicing and praise to unborn multitudes. "They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works," *Psa. cxlv. 7—9.* Behold also how he employs the goodness and mercy of the Lord as solid arguments in prayer. "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy, remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord," *Psa. xxv. 6—8, 10. Psa. lxxxvi. 3—5, 17.*

The GOODNESS of the Lord is abundant and immeasurable. It is most precious and satisfying. "My people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord," *Jer. xxxi. 14.* It is free, it is unfailing, it is universal. "Oh how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee: which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men," *Psa. xxxi. 19.* May we not therefore call on every human being, and say, "O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in him," *Psa. xxxiv. 8.*

Should we attempt to speak of the MERCY of the Lord, it is altogether indescribable! "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth

in mercy. He will turn again. He will have compassion upon us. He will subdue our iniquities. And thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea!" Micah vii. 18, 19. How exceeding great is the mercy of the Lord! "For thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them, for thou art a gracious and merciful God," Neh. ix. 31; Isa. liv. 10. The mercies of Jehovah are rich and manifold. "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us," Eph. ii. 4. "Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies," Lam. iii. 32. They are tender and plenteous. "The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy," James v. 11. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy," Psa. ciii. 8. They are sure and enduring. "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David," Isa. ly. 3. "Oh give thanks unto the God of heaven, for his mercy endureth for ever," Psa. cxxxvi. 26. They are abundant and everlasting. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," 1 Pet. i. 3. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him," Psa. ciii. 17. Well then may every Christian unite with David, and say, "I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy," Psa. xxxi. 7.

Why are the goodness and mercy of the Lord thus abundantly revealed in Scripture? The answer is simple—that we may trust in him for them, and be enabled to say with David, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me through all the days of my

life!" Encourage thyself then, Oh believer, to trust in God fully, constantly, increasingly! The Lord is good in himself. Whether *you* trust him or not, "the Lord is good: a stronghold in the day of trouble: and he knoweth them that trust in him," Nahum i. 7. The Lord is merciful: he is "the Father of mercies," 2 Cor. i. 3. Oh, wilt thou not trust in him? "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him; in those that hope in his mercy," Psa. cxlvii. 11. If the goodness and mercy of an earthly monarch were proclaimed to a rebellious subject, would it not show exceeding hardness of heart, did he discredit the proclamation, and refuse allegiance? But should he believe the word of his sovereign, throw down the weapons of his rebellion, and say, "Goodness and mercy shall now follow me all the days of my life:" would not this exhibition of faith and confidence be but his obvious and bounden duty? At the same time would it not honour his sovereign, and promote his own happiness? Such is our position towards God. We are rebels under an extension of mercy. To trust in him, and cease from rebellion, is our positive duty. Is he not worthy of our fullest confidence? And the more we confide in him, do we not the more honour our Sovereign, and increase the happiness of our own minds? If then, Oh believer, thy God and Redeemer is pleased to bestow his goodness and mercy upon thee, why dost thou not rejoice? If he appoints these heavenly handmaidens to attend thee, why wilt thou not acknowledge his kindness, and say with David, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life?"

Live up to thy high privileges, Oh professing Christian! "God has given thee exceeding great and precious promises, that by these thou mightest be

partaker of the divine nature," 2 Pet. i. 4. If thou believest not the promises, thou dost defeat this sublime design! Instead of rising superior to the cares and the trials of life, thou becomest weak in soul, and troubled about many things which could not otherwise disturb thee! Oh pray for the gift of faith—a strong unwavering faith! "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," 1 John v. 4. It was faith alone which enabled David to say, "I shall not want"—"I shall fear no evil"—"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life!" He never for a moment imagined that he possessed any peculiar claim on the protection of God. Nay, he recognised no claim whatever. All was goodness, all was mercy, in his estimation. It was spontaneous goodness—it was unmerited mercy, from the first moment to the present. Having therefore experienced the lovingkindness of Jehovah hitherto, why should he not also enjoy it in the future? Does Jehovah change? Can his resources be exhausted? Does his strength fail? Does his love decay? Oh no! "The mountains shall depart; and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee," Isa. liv. 10. The heart of the Psalmist fully accorded with the sentiment which St. Paul has strikingly expressed, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," 2 Tim. i. 12. The sentiments of believers harmonize, under the teaching of the same Spirit. David could declare in another Psalm, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever, forsake not the

works of thine own hands," Psa. cxxxviii. 8. And St. Paul could not only affirm for himself, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom," 2 Tim. iv. 18 : but he could also comfort the Philippians with a similar assurance, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,' Phil. i. 6.

Rejoice then, Oh believer, in the unchangeableness of thy God. He is JEHOVAH. He changes not ; and therefore is it that the sons of Jacob are not consumed, Mal. iii. 6. Say, has not thy past life been one continued experience of goodness and mercy from thy God ? Is there a single step in thy pilgrimage where neither goodness nor mercy followed thee from above ? Is there any period of thy history regarding which thou canst deliberately assert that then the Lord had forgotten to be gracious ? Dark and dreadful as that period may have proved, and dismal as may be its recollection, hast thou never calmly thought that but for goodness and mercy it might have proved more dark, more dreadful still : that but for goodness and mercy thy soul might then have sunk into everlasting darkness ? "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not," Lam. iii. 22. The Psalmist lived upon this truth. In his weakest and most desponding seasons he fled to it for strength and consolation. Hear how it inspired him with a song of gratitude in a "day of trouble !" "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart ; and I will glorify thy name for evermore : for great is thy mercy toward me, and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell !" Psa. lxxxvi. 12, 13. Yes, Oh believer, that thou art still in the land of the liv-

ing, and in the place of hope, is a proof that goodness and mercy have followed thee! Wilt thou then dishonour Him who has blessed thee hitherto? Wilt thou distrust that God who has stored the future for thee with his promises? Look back with gratitude upon the past, and thou shalt learn to look forward with confidence to the future. "Acquaint thyself with God and thou shalt be at peace." Lean on his love! Rely on his strength! Confide in his promises! "He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad then in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart." "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly! O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee!"—A simple and steadfast faith in Thy promises, enables him to say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life!"

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.

VERSE 6.—*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

WHAT an appropriate termination to this most beautiful Psalm! The sentiment here expressed by the Psalmist surpasses all that the imagination can conceive, or that the heart can possibly desire! “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” What a satisfactory conclusion to a believer’s hopes! What a comprehensive statement of a believer’s privileges! It includes all the honours and the happiness which he has already enjoyed in the fold of his Shepherd, and at the banquet of his Lord. It implies that they shall all be continued to him as his future portion, with still higher privileges and richer blessings. And it heightens his joy, and crowns his hope with the assurance that all the glories of that house shall be his inheritance for ever and for evermore. It is as if David had said in analogy with the imagery in this Psalm, “I love the fold of the good Shepherd; I will abide within it continually—I shall be safe and happy in it for ever! At the banquet of my heavenly Host I rejoice to present myself as an invited guest. I shall never be excluded from his prepared table—and I know that he will receive me in his house with a gracious and everlasting welcome!”

The concluding sentence of this Psalm may be regarded as expressing the grand desire and determination of David's heart. The Lord had abundantly exhibited his loving-kindness towards him, and now he fully, freely, and for ever, chooses Jehovah as his portion, and his service as his delight. He had hitherto spoken of the unnumbered benefits which the Most High conferred upon him. Every succeeding verse enumerated some additional kindness which he had received from his faithful Shepherd and his gracious Host. In the first clause of this verse the Psalmist affirmed his conviction that "goodness and mercy would follow him all the days of his life;" and the last clause is shown to bear an important connection with that sentiment. He introduces it with the conjunctive particle "and," as if to intimate that intense gratitude constrained him to seek utterance for his feelings, and would not allow him to terminate the Psalm, till he had given expression to the noble resolution which the enjoyment of so many mercies had awakened in his breast. "Goodness and mercy from my God shall follow me all the days of my life: And I for my part will choose his house and service above my chiefest joy in time and in eternity."

O how delightful is it to hear a sinner declare by Divine teaching, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord!" Of his own natural inclination he would say, "I will not dwell with God. My delight is in the honours and the pleasures of the world. My greatest enjoyments are to be found in the society and mansions of my gay companions. Amongst them is my portion, and with them will I dwell!" But such was not the case with David. His mind had been en-

lightened from above to discern the hollowness of sub-lunary joys. He had been taught to estimate all things by the eternal standard. And though he beheld the world opening fair before him, though he enjoyed a bright prospect of merited honour and happiness, though his residence at the court of Saul introduced him to many new and valuable privileges, yet he prized above them all the constant access which it gave him to the courts of the Lord. He was about to become the son-in-law of the king, but he did not say, "I shall now be a favoured resident in the courts of royalty." O no! his affections were fixed on the sanctuary of God. Thither he repaired continually, and the full utterance of his heart's desire and determination was this, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord."

These words may likewise be considered as describing another of those high spiritual privileges which David enjoyed at the hand of God. This Psalm is one pre-eminently of privilege. It speaks throughout of what Jehovah vouchsafes to confer upon his people. And our thoughts will harmonize with all the previous sentiments which it contains, if we contemplate the Psalmist as having now reached the climax of his enumerated blessings. All conceivable happiness is comprehended in this one expression, "the house of the Lord." Not a single privilege for time or for eternity remains beyond it to be desired, and therefore with a full heart he sums up his joy and his Psalm together, saying, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!" Oh, what a blessed, what a glorious, privilege does the Lord confer on his believing people! He admits them to his gracious presence in his church on

earth, and he will receive them into his glorious presence in his church in heaven !

To be a constant worshipper before the throne of God in time and in eternity, was at once the grand determination and the most valued privilege of the Psalmist. It is the last of all the blessings which he enumerates : and it is the highest which he could wish to enjoy ! As the sheep knows not a greater safety than to abide in the security of its Shepherd's fold ! As the guest knows not a higher honour at the banquet than to enjoy the smile of his Royal Host ! As the infant dreams not of higher bliss, than to repose continually upon its mother's breast ! As the dutiful child recognises no happier dwelling than the home of its fond and beloved parents ! So the true believer finds all his security and honour in the fold and the favour of his God ! He can conceive of no happier home, of no higher bliss, than the home and the heart of his heavenly Father ! And therefore with a glad, a grateful, and a determined spirit, he exclaims, " I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever ! " To dwell in a house implies our admission to intimacy and friendship with its owner. To dwell in " the house of the Lord " insures our possession of honour and of happiness. And to dwell in His house " for ever " intimates the enjoyment of that friendship, and happiness, and honour, without interruption and without end !

The " house of the Lord " is a scriptural expression denoting both the church militant below and the church triumphant above. Of the former we hear David thus speaking in another Psalm, " One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his

temple," Psa. xxvii. 4. And of the latter we find our blessed Saviour thus informing his disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ; that where I am, there ye may be also," John xiv. 2, 3.

The house of the Lord on earth formed the immediate object of David's regard in the words before us. In his early days the Ark and the Tabernacle, alas, were separated from each other. The latter was erected at Nob, and the former rested at Kirjath-baal. The royal palace of Saul at Gibeah stood within a few hours' journey of both places. And therefore David, as a resident there, could more frequently enjoy the delightful services of the sanctuary, than when an inmate of his father's house at Bethlehem. And the testimony of the High Priest informs us that David neglected not his spiritual privileges, but often resorted to the Tabernacle to inquire of the Lord, and to pour out his heart in prayers and adoration, 1 Sam. xxii. 15.

To the Psalmist, and all the children of Israel, "the house of the Lord" was indeed the dwelling place of the Most High God. The cloud of his presence had covered their Tabernacle, and the brightness of his glory had shone within their Sanctuary. All God's dealings with men, and all their intercourse with him, were then closely connected with "the house of the Lord." There did he speak with Moses and Aaron from off the mercy seat : and there did the High Priest in later times divine by Urim and Thummim, receiving intimations of the Divine will on the illuminated letters of his golden breastplate. In the Tabernacle of old the Lord had recorded his name, and there he came

unto his people, and there he blessed them. Here the annual atonement for the sins of the nation was offered unto the Most High God. And here alone could sacrifices of expiation be made by the guilty transgressor or the ceremonially defiled. The trembling suppliant here obtained comfort from his sorrows, deliverance from his doubts, and victory over the fear of death. Here answers to prayer were graciously vouchsafed, and the humble believer was constrained to exclaim, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

The church is the house of Jehovah's choice. He hath desired it for his habitation. "This is my rest for ever, and here will I dwell," *Psa. cxxxii. 14.* By his wisdom the church has been framed: and with his grace it is richly stored. It is the temple of truth, and the palace of peace. It is the vestibule of heaven, and the sanctuary of safety to the soul. The church of God is built upon the Rock of Ages, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. Her walls are called Salvation: and all her gates Praise. Her place of defence is the munition of rocks. Bread shall be given her. The water of the Spirit shall be sure. The church of Christ is as the garden of Eden, and the whole earth like to a wilderness around it. The voice of the Lord God is heard as he walks therein, and his gracious presence is manifested there to his believing people. The church is a spiritual temple erected on the ruins of this fallen world. Glorious are the names and titles applied to it in the sacred Scriptures. It is called the city of God, *Heb. xii. 22.* The heavenly Jerusalem; Jerusalem which is from above, which is the mother of us all, *Gal. iv. 26.* A garden enclosed, *Cant. iv. 12.* The fold of the good Shepherd, *John*

x. 16. The bride and spouse of Christ, Cant. iv. 8; 2 Cor. xi. 2; Rev. xxi. 9. The body of Christ, Eph. i. 22, 23; Col. i. 18. The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth, 1 Tim. iii. 15.

The church of Christ is the "congregation of faithful men," living in all ages, and scattered throughout the whole world. "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end," Heb. iii. 6. Great is the blessedness we thus enjoy, and honourable the titles we possess. "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners," says the Apostle, "but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God," Eph. ii. 19. As living stones, all true believers are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. They constitute a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar and purchased people, 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9. They are manifestly declared to be epistles of Christ, written with the Spirit of the living God, 2 Cor. iii. 3. The Saviour regards them as the lambs of his flock, and the sheep of his fold, John xxi. 15, 16. He denominates them the salt of the earth, and the lights of the world, Matt. v. 13, 14. They shall be pillars in his temple, Rev. iii. 12, and a peculiar treasure in his estimation, Psa. cxxxv. 4,—jewels in his crown, Mal. iii. 17, and a royal diadem in his hand, Isa. lxii. 3. Henceforth they are to be called not only servants and disciples, but the friends of their Saviour, John xv. 15, and the brethren of their Lord, Matt. viii. 21. From being slaves of the world, he has made them his own free-men, 1 Cor. vii. 22, and citizens of heaven, Phil. iii. 20; yea also kings and priests unto God, Rev. i. 6.

What shall we more say of the church and congregation of the saints? *Psa. lxxxix. 5.* Are they not the sons of the living God? *Hos. i. 10,* and dear children in his sight? *Eph. v. 1.* Are they not heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus? *Rom. viii. 17.* Are they not members of Christ's body? *Eph. v. 30,* partakers of the Divine nature? *2 Pet. i. 14,* and one with God for ever and ever? *John xvii. 21.* Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear these words, if they be numbered among the righteous, and can say with David each one for himself, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!"

The church of God on earth is a lovely picture to us of heaven above. Here all meet together, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, male and female, bond and free. The various distinctions of life are laid aside for a time, and all ranks and conditions of men are united in God's presence as members of one happy family. They worship the same Father. They trust in the same Saviour. They enjoy communion with the same Spirit. As with one heart, and with one voice, they join in the same petitions, and offer up the same sacrifices of praise. Our hearts are gladdened and our faith is revived by christian fellowship. Thus to the true Christian the services of God's house are not empty and lifeless ceremonies. He had prepared his heart in his private closet for approaching God in the public congregation. He enters the house of the Lord not merely to meet with his fellow-men, but with the ever-present Saviour, and the all-quickenings Spirit, that his soul may be established in grace, and advanced in holiness.

"Blessed is the man whom thou choosest," O Lord, "and causest to approach unto thee, that he

may dwell in thy courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple," Psa. lxxv. 4. How elevating and enlivening to the soul to "join with the multitude that keep holy-day," and to present our common supplications as with one heart and voice before the throne of God! By divine grace we are enabled to "call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, and honourable." And when "we honour him, not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words, then, indeed, we delight ourselves in the Lord, and are fed with the heritage of Jacob," Isa. lvi. 13. The sabbath is to the believer both a foretaste and a pledge of his heavenly rest—the never-ending sabbath of eternity. "This is the day which the Lord hath made. We will be glad and rejoice in it." We remember the sabbath to keep it holy, and earnestly desire to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." With the departing week we lay aside our earthly cares, and with the opening day we begin the blest employment of heaven. Oh it is delightful to meet with our fellow-worshippers in the sanctuary of God! "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Here we meet our watchful Shepherd in his spiritual fold. Here, too, we are received by our royal Host, and are each enabled to testify, "The King hath brought me into his banquetting house, and his banner over me is love." "We sit down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet to our taste," Cant. ii. 3, 4.

Oh what a refreshing shadow and shelter is the church of God in an oppressive world! We escape from the burning sands and the fiery atmosphere of the desert of sin, and breathe the fresh and fragrant

air of heaven. Here the drooping hearts are cheered, the fainting are revived, and the wounded in spirit are healed. Here the troubled conscience is relieved, the unholy are sanctified, and the feeble have their strength renewed. "Times of refreshing" are experienced "from the presence of the Lord." He pours rich blessings from on high on all who worship him in spirit and in truth; and shows them most gracious tokens of his love.

Oh what liberty of access unto God does the believer enjoy! He draws near with a true heart, as a child unto a Father, to confess all his sins before Him in assurance of forgiveness—to tell Him all his wants, believing that they shall be supplied—to unbosom to Him all his sorrows, knowing that He will tenderly sympathize—and to express to Him all his joys, confident that He who gave them will rejoice with him! In the midst of earthly distresses, the believer is comforted in the house of the Lord by the unchanging love of his Redeemer. In difficulties, he finds guidance in his unerring wisdom. In dangers, he has a sure refuge in his almighty power. And in doubts and darkness and death, he here learns to repose on the truth and faithfulness of Him, who has promised never to leave nor to forsake his people!

How often has the mourning Christian obtained consolation in the house of God! How often has the distressed or the perplexed believer found the offering up of prayers suitable to his case, and relieving to his heart! The youthful inquirer after salvation has been here instructed and encouraged in the way of holiness! Those who have been suffering under temptations have been delivered from their power! Thus the house of God is a house of peace, of instruc-

tion, and of consolation to the true Christian. The sabbath is not a day of gloom and weariness to him. His "feet stand within the courts of the Lord," and his heart is "made joyful in his house of prayer." He hastens not as though glad to be dismissed, but would rather linger where God is worshipped. When he returns to his abode he gives thanks to the Lord for the privileges he has enjoyed. His heart is filled with gratitude at the thought that God has graciously accepted his confessions, and supplications, his praises, and intercessions. He trusts and prays that the blessings vouchsafed may never be lost upon his soul; and that he may continually become more humble on account of sin; more watchful over his besetting infirmities; more alive with love to God; more anxious to do good to men; and more determined to adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things!

The house of the Lord on earth, though immediately desired, did not form the grand and ultimate object of David's regard in the words before us. He looked beyond the narrow scene of this present world, and fixed his eye on the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Here all his desires terminated. In this all his privileges centred. Therefore he joyfully exclaimed, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

When the believer has bid farewell to the house of God—his spiritual home and friends, below;—he finds another home, and other friends, waiting to receive him above. The departed saint attains the summit of Mount Zion, and enters the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. He joins the innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven. He

appears in peace before God the Judge of all; and forms an everlasting fellowship with the spirits of the just made perfect. He comes near to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and finds that the blood of sprinkling has spoken better things for him than did the blood of Abel for the unrighteous Cain! Oh what a blessed exchange from the church on earth to the church in heaven! Goodness and mercy had followed him through life, and now goodness and mercy surround him on every side. Who shall describe the extatic emotions of his soul—his astonishment, his joy, his transport, at his entrance there? With what delight will he congratulate himself on his safe arrival in the abodes of bliss! What satisfaction will he feel with all that he beholds, and meets, and hears! With what grateful adorations will he worship that faithful God who has exceeded all his promises, and surpassed his own highest expectations! Oh who can conceive the rapture of joy and of gratitude with which he will join the song of his redeemed brethren! "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

During the period of his abode on earth he painfully experienced that the flesh warred against the spirit; and that amid the highest attainments in grace and converse with God, his soul was not completely holy and constant, not entirely free from various tempers and wanderings. Often with strong crying and tears had he prayed for the pardon of all his sins, and the cleansing of his deepest stains. Many a time had he desired to love his Lord with all his heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. Earnestly had he sighed for

true humility of spirit, godly sorrow for sin, and entire purity of thought and feeling. With intense longing after growth in grace he had said again and again, "I want more faith and love; more contentment and resignation; more patience and meekness; more knowledge; more zeal and courage; more hope; more joy; more freedom from the dulness and deadness of my nature; and more gratitude for my innumerable mercies!"

The friendly hand of death, however, has now delivered him from every carnal clog and earthliness, and set him free to take his place amongst "the spirits of the just made perfect," Heb. xii. 23. The departed believer has become a pure and perfect spirit. The burst and broken chrysalis of his mortal body has been left on earth to moulder into dust. No longer clogged by the material frame, he thinks, and speaks, and acts after the manner of angels. His soul is made perfect in all its powers and faculties. Its perception clear, its judgment sound, its love ardent, its gratitude intense. All its impressions are holy, its affections pure, its emotions sanctified, its thoughts and aspirations heavenly and divine. He is now in actual possession of a perfected spiritual nature, and is as capable of enjoyment, activity, and privilege, as are angels and archangels, those pure spirits that surround the throne. He is now perfect in love, perfect in peace, perfect in holiness, perfect in thought and apprehension, perfect in feeling and imagination, perfect in judgment and conscience, perfect in knowledge and in filial obedience to all the holy will of his heavenly Father! The departed saint, thus perfected in spiritual energy, will never weary in the everlasting employment of praising God. He will offer unto him a perfect service—perfect in the motives and affections of the worshipper—

perfect in the purity and fervency of the worship—and perfect in its uninterrupted and everlasting continuance. No reflected light of Urim and Thummim now intervenes between the worshipper and his God. He enjoys the beatific vision, and all ordinances, ministers, and sacraments are laid aside at once and for ever. His intercourse with the Most High is visible and audible, direct and personal. It both occupies and enlarges his faculties, calls forth and increases all his energies, and enlivens and refines his dispositions. No temptations will distract him now. No wanderings of thought will disturb the harmony of his communion with the Lord. He has now no shortcomings in duty or affection—no defects of intellect or energy—no weakness of memory—and no waywardness of will. He envies not those saints and angels who are superior to himself, and he looks not with disdain on any who are inferior. Neither pride nor selfishness now lurk within him. No impatience or murmuring, no hastiness of temper, or ebullitions of wrath, can now break forth. He will never again be actuated by a double purpose, or an unworthy motive. No disordered thoughts or discordant feelings torment him now. Lip service and formality have ceased. Lukewarmness and indifference are fled for ever. No divisions exist. No contentions arise. No party-spirit agitates. No cares or anxieties are felt—no fears and no perplexities, no doubts, no disappointments, no unholy suggestions from within or from without. Nothing now appears dark, nothing mysterious, and nothing contradictory, in the works, and ways, and words of God. All is light, and joy, and purity, within him and around him. Love is now his life, and praise the very element in which he breathes. He enjoys a

state of spiritual glory such as eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, and which it hath not entered into the human heart to conceive. He beholds the face of God in unveiled glory. He is fully and for ever freed from all sin and from all misery. The pure desires of his heart are now gratified, his holy hopes fulfilled, and the prayers of his faith all answered. Prayer itself has now given place to praise, and no room remains for any more petitions. He now believes God fully, fears him reverentially, follows him constantly. He now serves him faithfully, magnifies him worthily, rejoices in him supremely, and loves him perfectly !

The soul is now a perfected spirit, in a perfect state, and within a perfect place. It can do no wrong. It can see no iniquity. It can hear no evil. It can receive no spiritual hurt. Into the house of the Lord "there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth." Heaven is the residence of the Great King. The house of the Jehovah of hosts is a palace of perfection. It is a glorious house of purity and peace. It is a most capacious temple, boundless in extent, and dazzling with the splendour of uncreated light. Its courts are filled with worshipping inhabitants, and resound with the everlasting songs of the thousands of its redeemed, and the myriads of its angels. There the adorable Redeemer is seen in his human form. There too are Enoch and Elijah in their spiritual bodies. There live the souls of our Christian friends who left the earth before us. There are gathered the spirits of all the just, rejoicing in their unspotted purity, and glowing with the most intense happiness and joy. Jesus occupies their thoughts, forms the theme of their converse, and the object of their adoration. Their hearts

burn within them while he unfolds the things he had suffered, and the glory he has entered. They experience an ineffable delight in his service; they feel a childlike confidence and gladness in his presence; and they praise him in high and holy and seraphic strains!

Oh how imperfect are our highest conceptions of the beauty and the blessedness, the purity and the perfection, of the house of the Lord! To know it aright we must be caught up like St. Paul into the "third heavens." Little is revealed to us in the sacred Scriptures of the separate state. And great undoubtedly as are the happiness and the glory which the departed saint enjoys in that purely spiritual condition, we know that another state of being awaits him,—a state of still higher happiness and glory. The empty, broken, chrysalis of mortality is to be raised out of the dust, no longer a natural and corruptible frame, but a spiritual and immortal body. "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body," 1 Cor. xv. 44. Gathered from the dust of the grave by the hand of the Framer of the new creation, as are the grains of sand from the sea shore by the hands of the artificer, it shall be made a pure and crystal vessel meet for the reception of his pure and holy spirit. Oh what joy shall pervade the house of the Lord in the resurrection morning, when the saints shall be made perfect in soul and body—be delivered from the bondage of corruption—and be introduced into the glorious liberty of the children of God! Rom. viii. 21.

At the glorious appearing of the great God our Saviour, there shall be joy unequalled in heaven and earth. The "times of the restitution of all things" shall gladden every holy and intelligent being. The

jubilee trumpet shall proclaim that "the year of the redeemed has come." Then shall be a glorious release, such as the fiftieth year in ancient Israel but very faintly shadowed. There shall be universal liberty to all the people of the Lord. The bond slaves of corruption shall be emancipated without ransom. The debtor by sin shall be set free. The prison house of the grave shall be thrown open. The property of this world shall be restored to its original Owner in full possession. There shall be one continued season of social peace and harmony and joy; of brotherhood and happiness and prosperity. All the people as of old shall be arrayed in white and shining garments; they shall wave the palm, and they shall wear the crown.

The dead in Christ shall rise first, the living saints shall be changed into the likeness of their Lord: and both in one blessed company shall be caught up to meet their glorious Redeemer. The mighty working which is able to subdue all things, shall change their vile bodies and make them like unto the glorious body of Christ,—incorruptible, powerful, spiritual, and heavenly! In both natures the redeemed saints shall now be the entire and perfected possession of their Lord. They shall be completely delivered from the curse of the law, the bondage of the flesh, and the tyranny of Satan. Every evil and every enemy shall be put under their feet. Their names shall be confessed before the assembled angels: and they shall be placed in full possession of their everlasting inheritance. In body as well as in spirit they shall dwell in the house of the Lord, and surround the throne of the Lamb!

The "pilgrims" have now reached their rest, and the "strangers" have entered their home. The "good

and faithful servants" have "well done" their work, and are called into their "Master's joy." The runners of the "race" have "finished their course," and have gained "the prize of their high calling." The wrestlers in prayer have "prevailed with God," and have obtained a "princely name." The soldiers of Christ have "fought the good fight of faith;" they have secured the victory, and they have received the "crown of righteousness." The "little flock" now "fear not," for they see it was their "Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom." The "poor" now find "treasure in heaven"—an "inheritance in light"—"fulness of joy"—and "an eternal weight of glory." All doubts of their acceptance are for ever fled. Faith has now given place to sight; and hope to fruition. They know that they are now within the everlasting "mansion." They perceive that He who went before has indeed "prepared a place" therein for each of them. They feel that they are safe within their Shepherd's fold. They hear themselves welcomed at the table which their gracious Host has prepared before them. They "behold the King in his beauty." They live in the enjoyment of his love. God himself wipes away every tear from their eyes, and leaves not a single cause of sorrow to trouble them afresh. They partake of the most pure and satisfying happiness; unmeasured, inestimable, and everlasting! The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are their unfading Portion, their ever-open Temple, their everlasting Light, and their eternal Glory! They dwell in the house of the Lord, and are for ever encompassed with blessedness, because they are for ever encompassed with God!

Oh great and glorious home! may not every Christian say? Oh everlasting habitation of the Lord's

redeemed! "My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for thy courts; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God!" With the holy Psalmist I would sum up all my blessedness in this one declaration, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!" Here every holy desire shall be fulfilled—our joys shall be multiplied—and our privileges secured, for time and for eternity! Is this, O Christian Reader, the desire and the determination which thou hast formed? Do the goodness and the mercy of the Lord towards thee, constrain thy heart to choose his service, and to delight in the ordinances of his house? The privileges of the sanctuary of God are richly conferred upon thee in this favoured land! Art thou one of those who neglect not the assembling of themselves together with their Christian brethren? Prize this privilege. "Where two or three are gathered together in the Saviour's name, there is He in the midst of them," Matt. xviii. 20. Be ever ready then to meet thy Lord. Though no shekinah of glory be now visible in his temple, yet truly "the Spirit of glory and of God" is there present, and sheds a blessing on the heart of every sincere worshipper. Enter the house of the Lord then with a lively faith. Realize his spiritual presence. Acknowledge with gratitude his condescension in there meeting with his people. Delight thyself in his holy day, and in the services of his sanctuary. Earnestly desire to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," and to worship thy heavenly Father, at all times, in spirit and in truth. Seek for nearness of communion with him, and for an enlightened understanding of his word and will. Be solicitous to obtain in the house of the Lord on earth, a sanctified meetness for the services and the society of the house of the Lord in heaven.

Anticipate, Oh Christian, the eternal sabbath—thy heavenly home, of which the Lord's house and the Lord's day on earth are now to thee the type and the foretaste, the prelude and the pledge. Look forward eagerly, Oh Believer, to the duties and the privileges, the joys and the honours that await thee in "the house of the Lord for ever!"

Long after heaven!—thy God is present there, unveiled in glory—God thy Father—God thy Saviour—and God thy everlasting Comforter!

Long after heaven!—the Lord of all is honoured there—his law obeyed—his name hallowed—and his will delighted in!

Long after heaven!—it is full of holiness. Sin has never sullied it! No manner of evil shall ever pollute it! All its inhabitants are pure; the angels and the redeemed are without fault before the throne of God!

Long after heaven!—it is the rest that remaineth for the people of God—and it shall remain to them as a rest for ever! There pain and trouble and weariness are never felt! There sin and Satan and sorrow cannot enter. And there peace and plenty and prosperity continually abide!

Long after heaven!—it is the paradise of thy perfection in soul and body! There shalt thou reach the manhood of thy being—regain once and for ever the lost likeness of thy Creator—and hear again the voice of the Lord God walking with thee in the tenderness of his amazing love, and the plenitude of his everlasting friendship!

Long after heaven!—it is a GLORIOUS HOME! It is the house of the Lord, JEHOVAH. The created home of thy Eternal Father—the purchased home of thy Elder Brother—and the holy home of the Lord the

Spirit thy Sanctifier ! The "house of the Lord" is the ONLY HOME of all pure and holy beings. It is the SAFE and HAPPY HOME of angels, and of thy brothers and sisters in the faith ! It is the EVERLASTING HOME of the whole family of the redeemed ! There are they all gathered together in safety—there are they all joined together in love—and there do they all "dwell" together in unity, and go no more out of "the house of the Lord for ever !"

THE END.

